

# The ABCs of July 4th Safety

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The Fourth of July holiday usually brings plenty of opportunities for the 3 F's: Fun, Food, and Fireworks. That's why it's even more important to remember your ABCs: Always Be Careful.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, on average, 250 people go to the emergency room every day with fireworks-related injuries around the July 4th holiday. Most fireworks are illegal in the state of Illinois, but even the legal ones are risky.

“About a quarter of all ER visits are due to legal fireworks in the state of Illinois,” said Dr. Ben Kemp, OSF HealthCare Emergency Room Physician. “Sparklers, for instance, can be relatively dangerous if used inappropriately: given to children who are too young to handle them, or lit in a way that they shouldn’t be, which we see occasionally where people wrap a lot of fireworks together or light them in a way where they cause a larger fire and can be potentially harmful.”



Dr. Kemp continued, “Never light a firework in your hand, obviously that can explode unexpectedly, quickly and you can get blast injuries to the hand or burn injuries to the hand and be very harmful. And also burns to clothing – clothing lights on fire and you can get burns to other areas. Facial injuries too – so a firework goes off in somebody’s face and you get injuries to the eye, the face and can be rather harmful and something we have to deal with.”

Dr. Kemp reminds everyone when using sparklers or other legal fireworks to always have a hose or bucket of water nearby, do so in a wide, open area, and to make sure young children are kept at a safe distance. He also says be careful when it comes to alcohol use during festivities.

“Anytime somebody is drinking too much in the heat there is the risk of heat illness,” he warned. “Obviously drinking and driving is a terrible thing that we don’t want to see on a holiday, something us and law enforcement are very concerned about. And certainly mixing alcohol is a recipe for injury as well.”

The July 4th holiday is also a time for picnics. The Illinois Department of Public Health says each year about 1 in 6 Americans get sick from food poisoning, so you want to make sure you prepare, cook, and store any food properly.

“You want to make sure things are cooked appropriately. Food sitting out for hours at a time, so something that’s got mayonnaise on it that’s sitting out for 2 or 3 hours, those sort of things can be at risk to cause gastroenteritis or food borne illness,” said Dr. Kemp.

And what would a summer holiday be without water activities, whether in a pool, lake, or river? Again, safety is key. Drowning is the 3rd leading cause of unintentional injury death, with children most at risk. Water-related injuries are something emergency department physicians don’t like to see come through the door, because an ounce of prevention can go a long way.

“Always ensure that you’re in a safe environment to dive into the water or jump into the water. Making sure little ones are well supervised when they are swimming or have appropriate floatation gear on,” advised Dr. Kemp. “The tragic things are when a little one is unsupervised and gets into a pool or a young, healthy person dives into a shallow pool of water and injures their neck. Those are things we don’t want to see.”

Check out more tips on [Firework Safety](#), [Water Safety](#), and [Food Safety](#), for a safe and happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July!