

Lightning Safety Awareness Week

Lightning Safety Awareness Week, traditionally observed nation-wide during the last full week of June, not only helps get safety messages out in time for the Fourth of July (historically one of the most deadly times of the year for lightning) but also signals summer as lightning season in the United States. More people are outside during the summer: on golf courses, the beach, ball fields, parks and forests...and outside is the most dangerous place to be during a lightning or thunderstorm.

In the United States, there are an estimated 25 million cloud-to-ground lightning flashes each year. During the last 30 years, lightning killed an average of 67 people per year — more than the average of 65 deaths per year caused by tornadoes and the average of 16 deaths per year caused by hurricanes. While documented lightning injuries average 300 per year, undocumented injuries are likely much higher.

Now, during Lightning Safety Awareness Week, here are some tips on what constitutes safe shelter from lightning and what is dangerous.

What is a Safe Shelter From Lightning?

A house or other substantial building offers the best protection from lightning. For a shelter

to provide protection from lightning, it must contain a mechanism for conducting the electrical current from the point of contact to the ground. On the outside, lightning can travel along the outer shell of the building or may follow metal gutters and downspouts to the ground. Inside a structure, lightning can follow conductors such as the electrical wiring, plumbing, and telephone lines to the ground.

Avoid Unsafe Shelters!

Unless specifically designed to be lightning safe, small structures do little, if anything, to protect occupants from lightning. A shelter that does not contain plumbing or wiring throughout, or some other mechanism for grounding from the roof to the ground is not safe.

How Does Lightning Enter a House or Building?

There are three main ways lightning enters homes and buildings: (1) a direct strike, (2) through wires or pipes that extend outside the structure, and (3) through the ground. Regardless of the method of entrance, once in a structure, the lightning can travel through the electrical, phone, plumbing, and radio/television reception systems.

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Health Notes

By Audeen Wagner



CHILDREN AND DEPRESSION

I just learned that May is "National Mental Health Month", but it is never too late to talk about depression, especially as it affects our kids. Part of the awareness focus is on the fact that depression can strike children and adolescents as well as adults.

Left untreated (as is too often the case), childhood depression can trigger other even more serious conditions later in life, such as bipolar disorder. Almost one-third of six-to twelve-year-old children diagnosed with depression will develop bipolar disorder within a few years, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

A common response on hearing that a child is depressed is "but what does a child have to be depressed about?" In our current social structure there are many factors. It's a misconception that all children lead a carefree, trouble-free life. Kids' worries are many: Peer pressure? School performance (keeping those grades up so that he/she can be accepted in the college of choice)? Parental expectations? Fears about divorce, death, abandonment? Take your pick, it's just not easy to be a kid these days, and statistics show an alarming increase in childhood depression.

What to look for? Clinical depression goes beyond sadness. The signs of early-onset depression include:

- Persistent sadness and hopelessness
- Withdrawal from friends and from activities
- Increased irritability or agitation
- Poor school performance, decline in grades
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Poor self-esteem
- Physical complaints like headaches and stomachaches
- Low energy, low motivation
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Thoughts of death or suicide

We know that some children have risk factors in their lives which could predispose them to depression. Among these are a family history of mental illness, abuse (physical, emotional or sexual), chronic illness, loss of a loved one to death, divorce or abandonment. Any change in a child's behavior that seems to have no external or physical cause should be looked at.

Treatment. Once a child has been diagnosed with major depression, both psychotherapy and medication could be options. More and more, doctors are realizing that chemical imbalance often triggers mental problems, and psychotherapy is also an important piece of the puzzle to relieve depression. This "talk therapy" has proven to be vital to help a child deal with his past, and in learning ways to cope with difficulties in growing up.

Treatment with antidepressants for children has been, and continues to be, controversial. Most professionals in the field will recommend therapy first, except in cases where the child is very severely depressed or suicidal. The decision of whether to treat with medication should be addressed on an individual basis. Parents should be as educated as they possibly can, in order to make an informed decision. And, they should discuss treatment therapies in depth with doctors and mental health professionals.

If you care to "Google it," look up NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) or American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. These and other related sites present a great deal of information relating to depression in children. They also feature many success stories, which is encouraging.

Of course, the family caregiver is the best place to start. Providence-Vernonia Family Medicine can send families in the right direction to get help. If parents notice symptoms listed above, or if dramatic changes in behavior are seen, they should definitely seek help.

June is National Safety Month

This June, the National Safety Council (NSC) is hosting its 10th annual National Safety Month campaign. The NSC works through its local chapters to promote Citizen Corps Councils and provide citizen training in emergency preparedness. This year's theme is "Making Our World a Safer Place," with the week of June 19 set aside specifically for Emergency Preparedness.

"National Safety Month is a great time [...] to learn about how to prepare for natural dis-

asters and the ever-present threats of terror-strikes," said FEMA Director R. David Paulison.

With spring and summer ushering in increased risks for wildfire, flash flooding and thunderstorms throughout the Pacific Northwest, FEMA Regional Director John Pennington reminds residents that the time to plan how they'll respond when disaster strikes, is "before disaster strikes!"

"Now is the time to think

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