Here in the Sunshine State, we boast an extraordinary park system, as well as a climate that allows for year-round enjoyment of outdoor activities. In 2013, Florida received the National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park Management for the third time, becoming the only state in the nation to win this prestigious award more than once. With all the lakes, rivers, campsites, playgrounds, hiking and biking trails, historic sites, and white sandy beaches, Florida’s parks provide a multitude of opportunities for fun — as well as an array of risks of injury. Knowing these hazards in advance, taking precautions, and using common sense will help you keep safe outdoors year round.
Florida’s natural environment exposes those who work and play outside to many hazards, both seen and unseen. Here’s how to keep safe this summer.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SUN EXPOSURE.

★ WHY: The sun’s rays are especially harsh in the summer months. Preventing sun exposure will not only help you avoid a painful sunburn now, but also long term sun damage and skin cancer in the future.

★ HOW: Stay out of the sun as much as possible, especially between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm. Wear clothing that covers your skin, a hat with a wide brim, and sunglasses with UV protection. Use a sunscreen with at least SPF (sun protection factor) 30, even during overcast days, as the sun’s rays can penetrate the clouds and cause damage to your skin.

STAY HYDRATED.

★ WHY: The intense Florida heat makes staying hydrated a challenge, as your body loses fluids through sweat. Even mild dehydration can cause fatigue, and water is necessary for proper digestion and organ function. Losing too much water can lead to heat exhaustion or even organ failure.

★ HOW: Hydrate **before** going out into the heat. Be sure to replace fluids faster than they are being depleted. Carry a water bottle or hydration pack when you will be away from potable water. Eating water-rich fruits such as melon, berries, and peaches can help.

AVOID INSECT BITES.

★ WHY: More than a painful, itchy nuisance, insects such as mosquitoes carry diseases such as West Nile virus, dengue fever, and most recently, Zika virus. Ticks carrying Lyme disease are becoming more prevalent in Florida. And even a simple bug bite or sting can cause dangerous allergic reactions in some people.

★ HOW: Mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk — avoid places where they live and breed, such as thick woods and standing water, during those times. Dump out standing water, such as bird baths. Cover skin with long pants and socks, and
wear insect repellent. Keep clear of fire ant mounds and wasp nests. After hiking in woods or tall grass, be sure to check for ticks.

**EXPECT EXTREME WEATHER**

**WHY:** Florida’s weather in the summer can be unpredictable and dangerous. Sudden storms can cause flash floods, tornadoes, and frequent lightning strikes.

Use the “30-30 Rule” for lightning — take shelter immediately if there is less than 30 seconds between the flash and the thunder clap, and wait 30 minutes after hearing the last thunder before heading back outside. If you cannot go inside, take shelter in a car, if possible. If you must remain outside, avoid open or elevated areas, bodies of water, and tall objects such as trees. Do not use an umbrella, as it increases your risk of being struck.

If you find yourself outside during a tornado, try to get inside as quickly as possible. Find a small, protected space on the lowest floor away from windows. If you are unable to go inside, crouch down next to a strong structure or lie flat in a ditch or other low-lying area and cover your head. If you are in a car and cannot safely drive away from the tornado, park the car (but leave it running so the airbags work) and crouch down below the windows.

**BE WARY OF WILDLIFE**

**WHY:** Even Florida’s best managed parks and recreation areas have potentially dangerous flora and fauna, from poisonous plants and insects, to deadly predators such as sharks and alligators. Florida is home to six different species of venomous snakes, and rabies can infect any mammal.

**HOW:** Stay on the beaten path as much as possible. Familiarize yourself with the poisonous plants in our area, such as poison ivy, sumac, poisonwood, and stinging nettle, so that you can avoid them. (Visit the [UF IFAS Extension website](https://extension.ifas.ufl.edu/) for more information.) Wear long pants to protect your legs when walking in the woods. Never feed or approach wild animals. Do not throw food scraps into the woods or water, as this can attract animals such as bears and alligators.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** DEP’s website at [www.floridastateparks.org](https://www.floridastateparks.org) is an excellent resource for details about specific parks, including park rules, safety guidelines, and active alerts. [U.S. Climate Data for Florida cities](https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/climate-data/florida) can give you an idea of what kind of weather to expect in any given city during a given month. Visit [www.accuweather.com](https://www.accuweather.com) for today’s forecast where you are.
Earlier this year, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) held its inaugural Health & Safety Fair for its employees at the Koger Center in Tallahassee. The event focused on health, personal wellness, and safety, with more than a dozen exhibits by vendors, such as Kinetix Health Club, Martial Arts Fitness Academy, the National Weather Service, the Tallahassee Police Department, as well as groups within the agency itself.

Health and safety fairs such as these are designed to provide valuable information and screening services to employees, as well as teaching employees how to lead healthier lifestyles and practice safe behaviors both at work and at home.

According to Matt Jay, the Safety Coordinator for the FWC, the agency hopes to expand the event next year, possibly teaming up with other agencies such as the Department of Health and the Department of Financial Services’ Division of Risk Management. Jay wants to emphasize the link between safety, personal wellness, and fewer accident and injury claims, as well as health care costs. Contact Matt.Jay@MyFWC.com for more information about this event.

Want to host your own wellness and safety fair at your agency?

- Inspire learning with an activity-oriented fair – ask each participant to come prepared with a demonstration or hands-on teaching activity.
- Use the opportunity to showcase the state of Florida’s Employee Assistance Program.
- Promote the event using email messages, banners, flyers, etc.
- Contact the State Loss Prevention Program to have your event featured in the Safety and Loss Prevention Outlook newsletter.
The 20th Century saw a huge reduction in a number of illnesses such as polio, measles, mumps, chicken pox, hepatitis, and HPV, thanks to the development of vaccines. In recent years, however, the U.S. has seen an uptick in the number of cases of vaccine-preventable diseases. This is in part because vaccination rates among adults in the U.S. are extremely low, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Thousands of children and adults still suffer each year from illnesses which could have been prevented by immunization.

You may not realize that childhood immunizations can wear off over time and need to be “boosted” (this is why they are called “booster shots”). Also, adults are at risk for different diseases than children, such as shingles.

Which vaccines do you need as an adult? This depends on a number of factors, including your age, medical history, and lifestyle. The CDC recommends ALL adults receive the Influenza (flu) and Tdap (diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis) vaccinations, given no contraindications. A new flu shot is needed every year and typically becomes available in October. The Tdap booster is recommended for all pregnant women in the 3rd trimester, and for all other adults every 10 years.

Vaccinations are especially important in the workplace, as illnesses such as whooping cough and flu are highly contagious, and working in close quarters such as an office makes it difficult to avoid spreading germs to others. People with weakened immune systems (like those undergoing cancer treatment) are especially susceptible and benefit from “herd immunity”, where vaccinated individuals help protect others by not spreading the disease. Even normally healthy people who contract the flu typically miss 4-6 days of work, and their work performance is impaired by 20-40%.

Vaccines can be acquired at doctors’ offices, pharmacies, community health clinics, and other locations. To find a vaccine provider near you, visit www.vaccinefinder.org. Most health insurance plans cover the cost of recommended vaccines.

For more information about adult immunization, please visit the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/adults/for-partners/index.html. You can find schedules of recommended immunizations by age and medical indications here: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/index.html.
**COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE FLU**

**MYTH: The flu is just like a bad cold.**
Unlike with a cold, flu symptoms (fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, nausea, sore throat & cough) come on suddenly and severely. Complications can send flu sufferers to the hospital.

**MYTH: The vaccine is dangerous and can give you the flu.**
The virus contained in the vaccine is inactive and incapable of causing flu. A few people may have a reaction to the shot itself (soreness, slight fever), but it is rarely as severe as the flu itself.

**MYTH: The flu can be treated with antibiotics.**
Only bacterial, not viral infections respond to antibiotic treatment.

**MYTH: One flu vaccine will protect you for life.**
Vaccines provide protection for one flu season only, as the virus changes each year. You need to be vaccinated every year.

**MYTH: Pregnant women and children should not be vaccinated against the flu.**
The vaccine is safe and recommended for children over the age of 6 months, as well as pregnant women — in fact, newborns whose mothers received the vaccine are protected from the flu during the first few months after birth.

**MYTH: The flu vaccine won’t protect against swine flu.**
The H1N1 virus, or “swine flu,” is now one of the viruses included in the yearly flu vaccine.

**MYTH: Once you’ve had the flu, there is no need to be vaccinated until next year.**
It’s worth protecting yourself against other strains of the virus even after being infected with one.

**MYTH: Once flu season has begun in October, it’s too late to be vaccinated.**
Better late than never! Seasonal flu usually peaks between December and March, but the disease can occur as late as May.

**MYTH: “Stomach flu” is caused by the influenza virus.**
The flu is a respiratory disease, not a stomach or intestinal illness.

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**You Can PREVENT The Flu**

1. **Avoid close contact.** Stay away from people who are sick, and when you are sick, keep your distance from people.

2. **Stay home when you are sick.**

3. **Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.**

4. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.**

5. **Practice other good health habits.** Get plenty of rest, be physically active, drink lots of fluids, eat nutritious food, manage your stress, etc.
Staying **FIT** while you **SIT**

**HOW TO INCORPORATE EXERCISE INTO YOUR DAILY OFFICE ROUTINE**

**Martin Bjergegaard’s Six Tips for Fitting Exercise into a Busy Schedule:**

1) **Work out efficiently.** Choose high-intensity forms of exercise that don’t require much preparation or gear.

2) **Cater to your preferences.** Find something you love to do, and you will be more inclined to do it.

3) **Use competitions as motivation.** A challenge can help you push your limits.

4) **Make a schedule and commit to it.** Remind yourself that working out is a priority worth keeping.

5) **Track your activity levels.** Keep a workout log to monitor your progress, keep yourself on track, and make improvements.

6) **Choose something over nothing.** Squeeze in fitness whenever you can. Desk exercises can help!

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Working at a desk does not necessarily lend itself to an active lifestyle, so it’s important to find ways to incorporate activity throughout the day. Health & strength training coach Dr. Levi Harrison recommends taking a 5 **minute activity break for every 60 minutes** spent sitting. You can find his simple 10-minute workout for desk workers [here](#).

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According to Ron Friedman of the Harvard Business Review, exercise can:

- **Increase the health, happiness, and productivity of a workforce**
- **Lower insurance premiums and absenteeism through the prevention of injuries and illnesses**
- **Improve concentration, memory, mental stamina, and creativity**
- **Elevate mood and decrease stress**

A [study](#) done at Leeds Metropolitan University found that employees who exercise at work reported being more productive, better able to manage their time, and feeling more satisfied at the end of the day.

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EVEN WHEN NOT EXERCISING, BE SURE YOU ARE SITTING AT YOUR DESK PROPERLY TO REDUCE STRESS AND STRAIN ON YOUR BACK, NECK, JOINTS, & EYES.

Sitting all day already puts desk workers at risk for a number of health concerns, including metabolic syndrome, which includes high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high cholesterol, and obesity. Even more symptoms such as eye strain, shoulder and back pain, and pinched nerves may occur when sitting improperly or using ill-fitting equipment.

REALIGN YOUR BODY every 20-30 minutes by changing positions. Stand up frequently and correct your posture. Train your body to sit properly at your workstation.

CHAIR: Choose one that supports your spine, and adjust the height so your feet rest on the floor with your knees bent at a right angle. Use a footrest if necessary. Armrests should allow shoulders to be relaxed, or removed if they are in the way.

COMPUTER: Mouse should be on the same surface as the keyboard, centered with your body. Top of monitor screen should be at or just below eye level. Sit close to the keyboard, and tilt it to allow your wrists to be straight, using hand rests as needed. Use keyboard shortcuts to reduce extended mouse use.

TELEPHONE: If you talk on the phone while typing or writing, use a speaker or a headset rather than cradling the phone between your head and neck.

STANDING OR SITTING ALL DAY CAN CAUSE MUSCLE STIFFNESS & JOINT PAIN. PRACTICE THESE STRETCHES SEVERAL TIMES A DAY TO RELEASE THE TENSION.
REFERENCES

- “Tornadoes,” in The Florida State University Florida Climate Center, Office of the State Climatologist (n.d.). http://climatecenter.fsu.edu/topics/tornadoes