

The Medical Minute: Fireworks are beautiful but for professionals only

July 2 2012, By Susan Rzucidlo

Fireworks are meant to be enjoyed, but you'll appreciate them much more this Independence Day and all summer knowing your family is safe. Fireworks can be fun to watch, but they can also be very dangerous. Don't ever let kids play with fireworks or sparklers. If not handled properly, fireworks and sparklers can cause burn and eye injuries in kids and adults. The best way to protect your family is not to use any fireworks at home -- period. Attend public fireworks displays and watch the beauty, and leave the lighting to the professionals. Sparklers seem to be viewed as "the safest" but there are still many dangers. The following are safety tips for sparklers and fireworks:

- Children under 12 years of age should not use sparklers. Sparklers can reach 1800° Fahrenheit- hot enough to melt gold.
- Do not allow kids to pick up pieces of fireworks after an event. Some may still be ignited and can explode at any time.
- Never hold a child in your arms while using sparklers as they may grab for them.
- Sparklers and bare feet don't mix. Always make sure that everyone has close-toed shoes.
- The sparkler wire remains hot after the flame has gone out. Drop it into a bucket of water.
- Always stand at least 6 feet from another person with a sparkler to prevent eye injuries or burns.
- Teach older children to not wave the sparklers or run when holding it.

We recommend these precautions for adults using fireworks:

- Parents and caretakers should always closely supervise teens if they are using fireworks.
- Fireworks should only be used outdoors.
- Don't hold fireworks in your hand or have any part of your body over them while lighting. Wear some sort of eye protection, and avoid carrying fireworks in your pocket -- the friction could set them off.
- Always have water ready if you are shooting fireworks.
- Know your fireworks. Read the caution label before igniting.
- Obey local laws. If fireworks are not legal where you live, do not use them.
- Alcohol and fireworks do not mix.
- Wear safety glasses whenever using fireworks.
- Never relight a "dud" firework. Wait 20 minutes and then soak it in a bucket of water.
- Soak spent fireworks with water before placing them in an outdoor garbage can.
- Avoid using homemade fireworks or illegal explosives: They can kill you!
- Report illegal explosives, like M-80s and quarter sticks to the fire or police department. These explosives were banned in 1966 but still cause many injuries.

If a child or adult is injured by [fireworks](#), immediately go to a doctor or hospital. If an eye injury occurs, don't touch or rub it, as this may cause even more damage. Also, don't flush the eye out with water or attempt to put any ointment on it. Instead, cut out the bottom of a paper cup, place it around the eye, and immediately seek medical attention. If it's a burn, remove clothing from the burned area and run cool, not cold, water over the burn (do not use ice). Call your doctor immediately.

More information: For more information about fireworks safety and burn prevention, visit www.fireworksafety.com or call to the Pediatric Trauma Injury Prevention Program at Penn State Hershey Children's

Hospital at 717-531-SAFE (7233).

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