

Survey finds many are buying fireworks this year due to COVID-19 cancellations

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A new national survey by Orlando Health finds many people are planning to buy fireworks this summer because of public displays being canceled amid COVID-19, prompting concerns about an increase in serious injuries. Credit: Orlando Health

Fireworks are a time-honored tradition of July Fourth celebrations and a signature sound of summer in America, but many public displays are being canceled this year amid COVID-19 social distancing. Health

experts worry this could lead to an increase in fireworks-related injuries as more people attempt to put on their own displays, a concern validated by a new national survey by Orlando Health. The survey found more than two in five Americans plan to buy fireworks this year, including 16 percent who say their purchases are a direct result of COVID-19 cancellations.

"You have more inherent risk of people getting bigger and better [fireworks](#) than they usually acquire for themselves because there's not going to be large aerial shows," said Elizabeth Gibson, MD, an [orthopedic surgery](#) resident at Orlando Health. "They may try to take it upon themselves to have the best fireworks show in the neighborhood or the best fireworks show that their family has ever put on and a lot of people don't realize just how dangerous these fireworks are until they sustain a life-changing [injury](#)."

It's something Dr. Gibson saw firsthand after 16 people were treated for serious fireworks-related injuries in Orlando Health's emergency department in the one week surrounding the July Fourth holiday in 2018. "It became a public health concern that my colleagues and I felt compelled to speak out about to try to prevent as many of these injuries as possible," Gibson said. "We planned a series of media events to warn about the dangers of fireworks and give tips to stay safe."

Their outreach was successful, with a 75 percent drop in injuries the next summer, but Gibson worries those numbers could spike once again as more people plan on setting off their own fireworks.



Elizabeth Gibson, MD, speaks with a patient at Orlando Health. She says fireworks-related injuries usually increase around the July Fourth holiday, but she worries this year could be even worse as people set off their own fireworks amid COVID-19 cancelations of public displays. Credit: Orlando Health

"A lot of people use fireworks without incident, but when accidents happen, they result in devastating injuries that greatly affect the lives of victims and commonly take several surgeries to recover from, along with months of physical therapy," Gibson said. "People lose fingers and even their entire hand, there is often extensive tissue damage to upper extremities or the eyes and face. And every year there are several deaths in the U.S. as a result of fireworks injuries."

Josh Baker understands just how quickly these accidents happen. He lost a thumb after he reached in to adjust a fireworks mortar that had tipped toward onlookers while he and his neighbors put on a display in Sanford, Florida.

"I just remember it went off and I looked down and could see straight through my hand," Baker said. "Ultimately, I'm lucky all I lost was my thumb. If I had leaned in a little more or turned my head a different way, I might have never left the dock that day."

Baker had surgery to remove his big toe and attach it to his hand where his thumb once was. He says, as a firefighter, he now has a heightened awareness of just how many people suffer injuries similar to his.

"Every year I brace for those calls around certain holidays like New Year's Eve and July Fourth, and every year, without fail, there are people who lose some fingers or a hand," Baker said. "I think it's something you have to have a healthy respect for. It may seem like a lot of fun, but fireworks are dangerous explosives and people need to be extremely cautious when using them."

Even products that may seem harmless, like sparklers, should be used with caution. They burn up to 2000 degrees, which is hot enough to melt metal and certainly hot enough to burn through skin and other tissues. Health experts don't recommend using any fireworks outside of small novelties that don't leave the ground, but they say if you don't heed their advice, at least follow some safety guidelines to use them as safely as possible:

- Never hold a firework in your hand after it's been lit
- Do not reach in to check fireworks if they don't go off. Instead, douse them with water.
- Keep a bucket of water or a hose nearby in case of any mishaps.

- Do not allow children to access or light fireworks, and supervise use of acceptable products for children like sparklers.
- Stay sober. Most fireworks injuries involve the use of alcohol or drugs.

Provided by Orlando Health

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