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Doctors urge caution with July Fourth fireworks

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The Fourth of July is a day of picnics, parades and celebrations, and nothing quite says Independence Day like fireworks. However, doctors at Vanderbilt University Medical Center urge caution with consumer fireworks and suggest leaving these displays to the experts.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission says nearly 10,000 firework-related injuries are treated annually in U.S. emergency departments, mostly in June and July.

"Fireworks are explosives and need to be treated as such," said Corey Slovis, M.D., professor and chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine. "If you do not want your child around explosives, then keep them safely distant from fireworks."

Many assume sparklers are a safer alternative for Fourth of July fun, but Slovis says even they burn at approximately 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, which is hot enough to cause third-degree burns. Sparklers should never be close to clothing or other items that could catch fire, and children should not handle them.

Doctors say accidents can happen in just seconds, and lives can be changed forever when these recreational and often dangers explosives are in the hands of everyday citizens.

"Burns, lost fingers and blindness are some consequences of fireworks not working properly in close proximity of people," said Jeff Guy, M.D., director of the Vanderbilt Regional Burn Center.

Fireworks Safety Tips

While it is best to leave fireworks to the professionals, if you plan to have fireworks at your celebration, follow these precautions and set some rules in advance.

• Always read and follow all warnings and label instructions.

• Never allow children to play with or light fireworks.

• The adult lighting the fireworks should always wear eye protection. No one should ever have any part of the body over the fireworks.

• Use fireworks outdoors only.

• Be sure other people are out of range before lighting fireworks.

• Always have water handy (a garden hose and a bucket).

• Light fireworks on a smooth, flat surface away from the house. Also keep away from dry leaves and other flammable materials.

• Light only one firework at a time.

• Never throw or point fireworks at other people or animals.

• Never shoot fireworks in metal or glass containers.

• Never re-light a dud firework. Douse and soak them with water and throw them away.

• Dispose of fireworks by soaking them in water and then putting them in the trash can.

Provided by Vanderbilt Medical Center

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