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HIKING SAFETY

Clover Safe notes are intended primarily for 4-H volunteers and members nine years and older.



*Photograph Courtesy of
Siskiyou County 4-H
Program*

4-H members participate on hikes that take place in terrain ranging from relatively flat land to steep, rugged topography and from wetland to desert conditions. Precautions to prevent injuries vary somewhat depending on the type of terrain and habitat encompassed by the path of the hike. Common injuries that are related to hiking include strains, sprains, cuts, bruises, insect bites, and sunburn. By taking several simple precautions and becoming familiar with the area and path to be hiked, 4-H members can control and/or reduce exposure to conditions that may cause injuries.

The following precautions should be followed to reduce the potential for incurring hiking-related injuries:

- Good safety practices are to (1) tell someone (that is not participating) the hiking route and when the hikers should return or complete the hike, (2) hike with a group or partner in remote areas, (3) bring adequate water for the weather conditions, and (4) carry a first aid kit and cell phone or other communication device while hiking.
- When possible, know the route(s) you will be taking during your hike. Carry a reference hike-route or -location map, if necessary.
- In case of an emergency, know how to direct emergency responders to your location or transport an injured person to the closest medical facility.
- Do not wander from your hiking group or partner.
- If you notice that a member of your hiking group is missing, immediately notify your project leader, parent, or guardian.
- Always treat hilly and mountainous topography with caution. Carefully pick the spots where you intend to step. Be careful of dislodging rocks onto other hikers below or following you.
- Walk carefully in uneven terrain, especially when the ground surface may be obscured by vegetation or during twilight or at night.
- Dress appropriately for the weather conditions and hiking path terrain: as necessary wear a hat, long pants, boots or sturdy shoes, jacket, and skin and eye protection (i.e., sunscreen and sunglasses).
- Use insect repellants containing compounds such as DEET (repels insects) on exposed skin and permethrin (kills many insects on contact) on clothing only.
- Rock climbing without proper experience or equipment is dangerous and ill advised.
- Always be aware of potential temperature extremes associated with the hiking path and area. Dress appropriately for extreme temperatures that may cause heat or cold stress.
- Be particularly alert for falling rocks, rock slides, or rock falls when hiking in proximity to cliff faces or steep rock outcrops. Wear a safety hat when hiking in areas where falling rocks are common.
- When hiking in wet areas or in proximity to water, beware of stepping onto slippery rocks, slopes, or ground.
- When hiking in wetland areas, be cautious of stepping onto unsupported vegetation, soft mud, or quicksand. Use a pole or branch to probe the path surface ahead of you when crossing wetland areas.
- Be conscious of tidal cycles when hiking in coastal and estuarine wetland areas. Consult tide tables or similar reference materials and plan your hike accordingly.
- Whenever a lightning threat becomes apparent, move to a low spot and seek shelter immediately.
- If you encounter a snake, remain calm and back away slowly. Always give snakes plenty of room to escape from you. Never approach, tease, corner, or poke at any snake.
- Closely look for snakes or insects before placing your hands on objects such as rock outcrops or trees or picking up objects from the ground (i.e. rocks, plants, leaves, etc.)
- Thoroughly inspect the area where you intend to sit, particularly around stumps, logs, boulders, or rock outcrops.
- If you experience an insect bite or sting, wash the wound with soap and water, apply an antiseptic, and cover the wound with a band aid or clean dressing. Carefully remove stingers from skin by using tweezers and then clean and dress sting wounds. Never scratch an insect bite or sting.
- Promptly seek professional medical attention if you suspect you are experiencing severe venom allergic reaction symptoms.
- If a snakebite occurs: calm the victim, wash the area of the bite with soap and water, apply a cold dressing over the bite area, and immediately transport the victim to the closest medical facility for professional treatment. Also, remove jewelry, watches, and tight clothing in preparation for tissue swelling.