

Opinion: Best chances for staying out of an ER

By Warren Withers

There may be no better place on Earth than Lake Tahoe – especially in the summer. As proof, more than 1.5 million visitors make their way to the South Shore of Lake Tahoe each year, and locals by the thousands take advantage of the superb surroundings.

Most who enjoy Tahoe return home with only good memories. However, a few find that they need urgent medical services during their visit. The following advice will help you avoid the most common ailments seen in the emergency department, so you can stay safe and have fun this summer.



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Avoid slips and falls. Slips and falls while boating, camping and hiking are common. Taking extra care when entering and exiting boats from the dock can help you avoid many dockside injuries. Get an extra hand from a friend, especially if it's been a while since you've been on a boat.

Protect your feet. As harmless as it may seem, going barefoot at a campground is risky. We see many happy campers become less so after they step on pine cones or other sharp objects while not wearing shoes.

Protect your ankles. Wearing shoes or boots with proper support can help you avoid ankle sprains when you venture out on the trail.

Protect your skin. Sunburns can ruin your vacation. People forget that at high altitudes (the lake is at about 6,225 feet), sunburns happen much more quickly than at sea level. Proper application of sunscreen: use of broad-rimmed hats and moderating time spent directly in the sun will keep your skin healthy and reduce your risk for skin cancer.

Stay safe in the water. What would Tahoe be without water sports? To stay safe in the water, wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life vest. It's a simple thing and if you're going to be out on any sort of watercraft, it could save your life. And it's the law. Swimming is fun and the water is refreshing, but extended exposure to Tahoe's cold water can result in hypothermia, which makes swimming difficult. If you are taking up a new sport, like kayaking or paddle boarding, take a lesson. You'll be far safer if you understand the basics of the sport.

Consider the altitude. The beauty and grandeur of Tahoe is spectacular, but if you have a medical condition, especially one that involves your lungs or heart, discuss your trip with your doctor before you visit. Be sure to mention the altitude level. With proper preparation, most people can enjoy a trip to Tahoe.

Beware of reptiles, arthropods and animals. Rattlesnakes and scorpions are very rare in the Tahoe basin, but do exist on the slopes and valleys outside of the basin. Black bears are generally placid animals that mind their own business unless provoked. Food must be carefully stored when backpacking and at campsites – use the provided bear boxes – as bears will wander into busy campgrounds in search of food.

Consume alcohol in moderation. Boating while intoxicated is

dangerous and illegal, as is operating any vehicle – even bicycles – while under the influence. Consume alcohol in moderation, especially at high altitudes, and do not drink and drive.

Enjoy Tahoe – we wish you happy memories and experiences. If you find yourself in need of medical care, know that Barton Memorial Hospital, with our board-certified staff, 24/7 emergency department and Barton Urgent Care will provide you and your family excellent care.

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