



Jeb Bush
Governor

M. Rony François, M.D., M.S.P.H., Ph.D.
Secretary, Department of Health

PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Jeannine Mallory, Public Information Director
PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
727-824-6908 (for media use only)

Spring is here - stay safe in your lawn and garden

Spring is here and summer isn't far away! Whether you garden 15 minutes a day or all weekend, gardening can be satisfying once you learn the basics. Health and safety should be a primary concern for all who garden, whether novice or expert. Take precautions so that your time is spent enjoying your garden, and not seeking emergency room care.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 71,000 individuals went to emergency rooms because of injuries related to push mowers, and nearly 15,000 suffered injuries related to riding mowers and garden tractors in 2003. Additionally, nearly 39,000 individuals went to emergency rooms with injuries related to garden tools and supplies.

Here, from your Pinellas County Health Department, are some tips to help keep you "garden-safe" and healthy:

Dress to protect.

Wear protective attire if you use lawn and garden chemicals, use heavy tools and equipment, are around insects and poisonous plants or work in the hot sun.

- Tall grass may harbor creatures that sting or bite, so wear long pants, socks, and sturdy shoes or boots.
- Objects such as small rocks, sticks, pine cones or other debris may be propelled from lawn mowers or other equipment. Wear safety goggles, sturdy shoes and long pants when operating this type of machinery.
- Protect your hearing. When operating equipment or machinery, if you have to raise your voice to talk to someone who is an arm's length away, then that equipment's noise can be potentially hazardous to your hearing.
- To protect yourself from the sun and reduce your risk for developing skin cancer, wear long sleeves, wide-brimmed hats and sunscreen.
- Use sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher. The most effective products say "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection" on their labels. Continue to reapply sunscreen according to the package directions.
- To protect against West Nile Virus and other mosquito-borne diseases, use mosquito repellent and eliminate mosquito breeding sites.

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- Take precautions to protect yourself against ticks and Lyme disease. If you're in an area with ticks, wear long-sleeved shirts, and tuck your pants in your socks. You may also want to wear high rubber boots since ticks are usually located close to the ground.
- Know what poison ivy or oak look like and take precautions.
- Wear gloves to lower the risk for small irritations or cuts.

Put safety first.

If you haven't been active all winter, don't overdo it when you start. You'll have plenty of time to get out there and dig in the dirt this year! Plan ahead and work smart. Equipment and chemicals, such as lawn mowers, ladders, tillers, shovels, and pesticides, are commonly used in the garden. The potential for injury is high if you are distracted, are unaware of potential hazards, or use the chemicals or equipment improperly.

- Walking, lifting, pulling, pushing, bending, reaching, carrying and hauling can lead to strains and exhaustion. Listen to your body and monitor your level of fatigue, heart rate, and physical discomfort.
- Watch how much repetitive motion is involved. Wrists, backs, elbows and knees may be especially vulnerable to overuse during the season. Break up activities into manageable periods to ease the strain.
- Start at an easy pace and increase time or distance gradually.
- Keep harmful lawn and garden products, tools and equipment out of the reach of children.
- Unplug or disconnect power equipment before cleaning or making repairs.
- Clean tools properly and put tools and equipment out of the way to avoid tripping or falling.
- Handle gas and electricity properly.
- Sharpen tools carefully.

Know your limitations. Use common sense.

Know yourself and any physical, mental, or environmental concerns that may impair your ability to work in the garden safely. Consult your health care provider about any precautions you may need to take.

- If you have arthritis, use tools that are easy to grasp and that fit your ability and circumstances. Recent studies have shown that moderate physical activity three or more days a week can help to relieve arthritis pain and stiffness and give you more energy. Regular physical activity can also lift your mood and make you feel more positive. If you are having an acute flare-up of your inflammatory arthritis, it may be better to restrict your exercise to simple range of motion (carefully moving the joint as far as it can go) during the flare-up.

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- Seek shade from the hot sun. If you must work in the sun, work in the early morning or late afternoon and drink plenty of fluids.



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- If you're taking medications that may make you drowsy or impair your judgment or reaction time, don't operate machinery, climb ladders, or engage in activities that may increase your risk for injury.
- Be aware of the signs of overexertion. Breathlessness and muscle soreness could be danger signs.
- Know the warning signs and signals of a heart attack, such as sweating, chest and arm pain, dizziness, and lightheadedness.

Take breaks and stay hydrated and nourished.

There's a lot to do in the yard and garden. Fuel your body well to help get you through the day's activities.

- Drink plenty of water throughout the day to replace lost fluids. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink.
- Don't drink liquids that contain alcohol or large amounts of sugar, especially in the heat. These actually cause you to lose more body fluid.
- Take frequent breaks and rest when needed. Try to rest often in shady areas so that your body's thermostat will have a chance to recover.
- Eat healthy foods to help keep you energized.

Get your immunizations.

Immunizations are for everyone, not just for kids. Adults and adolescents can also benefit from them.

- All adults should get a Td (tetanus/diphtheria) shot every 10 years.
- Tetanus lives in the soil and enters the body through breaks in the skin. Because gardeners use sharp tools, dig in the dirt, and handle plants with sharp points, they are particularly prone to tetanus infections. Before you start gardening this season, make sure your Td vaccination is up to date.
- While you're at it, ask your health care provider if you need any other vaccinations this year.

Enjoy yourself!

Take time to relax and enjoy the fruits of your labor. Make gardening fun, not stressful, hazardous or harmful.

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The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.
www.PinellasHealth.com