



Summer—glorious summer!

Time to dig in the sand, gulp from the hose, play at the park, and leap with joy! Unless you're a kid—in which case, find yourself a comfy sofa in a dark, quiet room and settle in.

This is the season your parents are bombarded with the kind of warnings previously associated with incoming torpedoes.

The basic message: Don't have fun—it's too dangerous.

“Remember when digging in the sand at the beach was a fun activity for young children?” asks the website KidsTravelDoc. “Sorry. No more. Based on recent findings, only with lots of do's and don'ts is frolicking in the sand a healthy activity.”

The blog's author, Karl Neumann of the American Academy of Pediatrics, lays out his own don'ts: “Studies show that children playing in the sand are more likely to become ill than children merely walking on it. And the risk of illness increases with digging in the sand, being 'buried' in it, and digging in wet sand.”

Got it. Keep your kids on dry sand. No, wait—“Dry sand presents problems, too.” So, Dr. Neumann warns: “Discourage children from lying directly on the sand.”

While you're at it, “Walking barefooted is another 'don't.' Have children wear lightweight, ventilated, hard-soled footwear that covers the toes. This helps prevent stubbed toes, lacerations, puncture wounds, and burns from hot sand. Ideally, footwear should be worn for wading in the water.”

In fact, why take your kids to the beach at all? Better to keep them at home on a hard, nonporous surface, free of dirt and obstacles, checking frequently for venomous spiders, disease-bearing insects, and sewage. Children should also be in steel-toed work boots. Come to think of it, chain-mail wouldn't be a bad idea.

But even that isn't enough. Simply keeping the kids at home doesn't ensure they're safe either, especially if they make it into the backyard. Parents Magazine warns that “bees are attracted to flowers, so don't put fragrances or floral-patterned clothing on kids.” Surely, you've seen swarms of bees chasing children in floral prints.

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that if your moppets still insist on playing

outside, the little daredevils at least should “limit sun exposure during peak intensity hours—between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.” That shouldn’t put a crimp in anyone’s day, should it?

The Academy is afraid that kids will get too much sun. It’s also afraid they’ll get too little sun and end up with rickets. A related fear is that kids won’t get enough water because...everyone is obsessed with “hydration” these days.

It’s always seemed to me that drinking when thirsty does the trick. Apparently, I was wrong. Now there’s a product on the market—a water bottle with a wi-fi connection. The app allows parents to monitor how much water their child is drinking. The obsessive little gadget even knows if the kids are secretly not drinking—pouring out water to stop their parents from texting them to drink more. And an animated character on the bottle’s built-in screen grows healthier and happier the more the child drinks. Let’s hear it for more screen time!

The wi-fi water bottle has yet another great advantage: it keeps the little ones from drinking the wrong sort of water. Google “hose water” and you will be drowning in stories linking the stuff to just about every illness except gout. Some study, endlessly reported, found that hose water contained “PVC plastic additives, which can cause birth defects, liver toxicity, and cancer.” Naturally, in these stories there is no mention of how many gallons of water a child would have to guzzle for any of these issues to ever develop.

Being a kid these days is no walk in the park. But that’s just as well. Yet another Parents Magazine piece warns that to keep children safe at the playground, you should “walk away if you see cement, asphalt, dirt, or grass: these surfaces are linked to head injuries.” So are walls, if you bang your head against them.

My advice to parents is therefore short and sweet: Tell your kids they can’t swim alone or get into a stranger’s car. And then stop reading other safety tips and, maybe—just, maybe—kids can have a real childhood.

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