



*Center for
Health & Hygiene
in the Home & Community*

The Center for Health and Hygiene in the Home and Community serves as a national and international resource for information and education, applied research, professional training and conferences. The Center focuses on issues relating to hygiene and infection control in areas such as:

- consumer food safety
- home hygiene
- daycare
- preschool
- homecare
- sports and leisure activity
- travel and hospitality

Simmons College
300 The Fenway
Boston, MA 02115

www.simmons.edu/hygieneandhealth

*Center for
Health & Hygiene
in the Home & Community*

Hygiene and Health Tips
for
Camping and Backpacking



August 2007

Wilderness Hygiene and Health

If you are visiting the great outdoors this season, hygiene is more than just needing a long hot shower after a few days in the woods. Your health and personal comfort, the health of fellow campers and backpackers and the wellbeing of the wilderness environment itself are all at stake as well. Good hygiene practices can reduce the spread of disease.

Campers, day hikers, and backpackers need to be cautious about bacteria, viruses and other pathogens which can be kept at bay through personal hygiene practices and environmental cleanliness. Getting ill can spoil your camping or backpacking experience, so stay healthy and have fun! Follow our helpful guidelines to have a safe and happy time while exploring the great outdoors.

Take a look inside for guidelines to having safe camping and backpacking trip. . .

Resources

[Camping Healthy: Hygiene for the Outdoors](#)

by Buck Tilton and Rick Bennett

[How to Prevent Food Poisoning: A Practical Guide to Safe Cooking, Eating, and Food Handling](#)

by Elizabeth Scott and Paul Sockett (published by John Wiley & Sons)

[Partnership for Food Safety Information](#)

<http://www.fightbac.org/main.cfm>

[A Guide to Camping and Wilderness Survival](#)

http://www.wildernessmanuals.com/manual_3/chpt_2/5.html

Wilderness First Aid Checklist

Be prepared for camping and hiking accidents with a well-stocked first aid kit. You should anticipate accidents such as cuts, scrapes, scratches, rashes, burns, bug bites, and gastrointestinal problems among others.

A well-stocked first aid kit contains:

- bandages and gauze of various sizes
- antiseptic creams and ointments
- sterile wipes and rinse solutions
- tweezers for removing thorns and splinters
- scissors and knife to cut tape and bindings
- sunburn relief spray preferably an aloe vera solution
- headaches and internal pain relief medication
- anti-diarrhea medicine for intestinal problems
- chapstick for the lips
- zinc oxide or sunscreen of at least 30 SPF for skin protection
- burn cream
- snakebite kit
- anti-itch cream/gel
- hand sanitizer
- hand soap
- isopropyl alcohol

Adapted from:

First Aid Checklist for Campers,
by David Sweet available online at:
<http://camping.about.com/od/campinggearchecklists/a/aftercamping01>.

***Be sure to pack the essentials!
Download a free camping checklist at:
www.camping.about.com.***

Personal health habits

Being out in the wilderness does not mean that you can automatically throw caution to the wind and forget everything you know about germ prevention. Instead, it's important to be vigilant in practicing good hygiene and health habits. Here are some important reminders:

Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids. It's easy to quickly become dehydrated outdoors, carry a bottle of water with you everywhere. Check out our water safety tips below.

Try to avoid getting to the point of exhaustion. If you are fatigued, your natural resistance will be lowered and you are also more likely to be involved in accidental injuries.

Good hand hygiene, practiced frequently, will reduce the risk of infections. If possible, wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, and always:

- Before preparing, serving, and eating food
- After using the latrine
- After touching any contaminated items such as uncooked meats or soiled laundry and diapers.
- After contact with pets/ animals and animal feces.
- After swimming and contact with natural waters.
- Before treating skin wounds

When soap and water are not available, and hands are not visibly soiled, an alcohol-based hand gel will kill germs on the hands if used according to instructions on the container. Be sure to carry a



small bottle of hand sanitizer in your pocket and use it frequently – after bathroom breaks; before grabbing a handful of trail mix; before

cooking dinner. This cuts down on the prospects of ingesting bacteria and viruses that can make you ill.

Prevent skin infections by washing daily and only using your own washcloths and towels. Any sores or wounds need to be kept clean and covered with a bandage at all times. Wash or sanitize your hands after touching any sores or wounds.

Remember to brush and floss your teeth regularly, even if you do not have toothpaste. Bacteria can build up quite quickly in the mouth and this can help prevent infections and cavities.

Regular bathing is important to remove the sweat and grime that naturally build up on your body. It will also allow you the opportunity to examine yourself for signs of injury, rash or sores. Use plenty of soap and water if possible.

Dispose human waste in the wilderness with good judgment and common sense. Failure to learn the proper procedures will damage the environment. It can also lead to stomach upsets due to improper sanitation practices. One of the sources of *Giardia lamblia* ("jar-dee-ah") in the wilderness is the improper disposal of human waste. Refer to any national parks guide book for proper waste disposal methods. If you experience diarrhea or vomiting seek care at the ranger station or go to a clinic or hospital immediately to avoid accidental spread of illness.



Food storage, preparation, and serving

Careful food safety practices are essential when preparing meals in outdoors. Here are just a few helpful tips: Anyone with open sores on their hands should not be preparing food or handling clean utensils or dishes.

Keep flies away from your food and drinks. If you do not have access to refrigerated/cold storage, plan meals that do not need perishable foods such as fresh meat, chicken, burgers, etc. Or use these foods on the first day, followed by meals with non-perishable foods such as canned and



dried foods. Store all food items in sealed container, such as coolers to smells from attracting wild animals.

Wash fruits and vegetables well with clean water (see below) before preparation.

Better still, wash them before you pack them for the trip and store in a clean container. This includes washing before cutting foods such as melons to prevent germs on the outside from contaminating the inside.

Exclude anyone with a respiratory or gastrointestinal illness (especially diarrhea) from any part of food preparation or kitchen duties.

Carefully dispose of any prepared leftover food items unless you are able to chill them in an ice cooler.

Plenty of hot water and dish soap followed by drying to get utensils and dishes clean. A final rinse in a bleach and warm (**not hot**) **water solution gives extra protection.** 1 teaspoon of bleach will sterilize 1 quart of water. Hot water causes the bleach to dissipate weakening the solution. Store dishes and utensils in a manner to prevent contamination.

Keep trash separate, sealed, and away from your sleeping area.

Drinking Water Safety

Most wilderness water sources in North America today are contaminated and not safe to drink. The microbe *Giardia* is found in 90% of these waters. The symptoms of drinking water contaminated with this microbe are chronic diarrhea and vomiting. These effects are commonly known as "Beaver Fever." To avoid getting sick, only drink water from safe water sources. Do not drink untreated water from lakes or streams. If you are unsure of the water safety, there are several ways of treating water found at your camp site or along the trail.

Boiling: Boil water for at least fifteen minutes. Bringing

the water to a boil is a great way of killing off the organisms and disinfecting it.

Iodine: Iodine tablets are another method of disinfecting water. Usually two or three tablets will do the trick. You just drop them into the water and wait thirty minutes before drinking. Iodine leaves a chemical taste in the water and you may want to add some drink mix to remedy this. The tablets have a shelf life of about three months, after which they should be replaced.

Bleach: Chlorine bleach may be used to disinfect water per the following guidelines:

- Use regular unscented liquid chlorine laundry bleach.
- Add two drops of bleach to one quart of clear water (use four drops if water is cloudy).
- Shake or stir well, then wait 30 minutes before drinking.

Filters: Most camping stores now sell water purification filters. Carefully follow the instructions that come with each filter.

Purification Tablets: There are various products available, follow the instructions and check with the manufacturer to make sure that the product is effective in removing bacteria, viruses, parasites and some heavy metals in contaminated water.

If you are going on day hike, the safest thing to do is bring your own water from home. That way you can be sure of its safety. Bring plenty of water and be sure to prevent contamination by keeping drink containers covered at all times and practice hand hygiene before handling clean water and water containers.

