**5 things to remember for spring and summer to keep you safe on the trails**

With the warm dry weather, many of us have already started taking in a few hikes, here are the five most common potentially life-threatening dangers on the hiking trail. Take heed and be prepared.

**Dehydration**:Dehydration may be the biggest danger on the trail. Dehydration can kill, and many hikers underestimate the amount of water they need, especially while engaged in vigorous activity. In a hot, dry climate like the spring we are now experiencing, a person can lose as much as 3 gallons of water a day through sweat alone. Signs of dehydration include thirst, sticky and dry mouth, reduced, dark colored urine output, headache, dizziness and fatigue. Make sure and drink more water if you experience any of these symptoms. Carry at least 1/2 to 1 quart of water for each hour you intend to hike, and don't wait until your dehydration becomes a life threatening emergency.

**Sun**: In addition to drinking plenty of water, you must protect yourself from the sun when you are on the trail. Sunburns are painful enough, but extreme sun damage can actually lead to infection, shock, and even death. Sun damage can also cause mutations in the skin that may result in skin cancer. Use sunscreen and reapply often, wear a wide brimmed hat and wear light colored clothing to protect your skin from the sun if possible. Light colored clothing will also make seeing ticks or other small insects easier.

**Poisons**: Whether you are talking about plants, insects or other animals, be aware that poisonous living things lurk on the trail. Know how to recognize poison oak, poison ivy and poison sumac--the three most common plants that cause severe allergic reactions through contact alone. Also, don't eat any plants that you are not absolutely sure are safe. Follow this link to a list of some common wild and domestic plants that can be deadly if ingested.

 <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/lawn_garden/poison/poison.html> While you are doing your research, make sure and familiarize yourself with the common poisonous snakes and lizards you may find on the trail. There is a handy guide to snakes on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes/> along with tips on how to survive a snakebite and links to information on venomous spiders, scorpions and insects.

**Parasites**: Just as dangerous as the poisonous creatures are the parasites you may encounter on the trail. Don’t ever swim or drink in stagnant water, which can be the home of worms, bacteria and even deadly amoebas. Chiggers and ticks are probably the most common danger you will face on the trail. Chigger bites are painful and scratching can lead to infection. Tick borne illnesses can be debilitating and some may even kill you. Avoiding contact with chiggers and ticks is difficult while hiking, but you can help repel them by using a spray containing DEET on your skin or permethrin on your clothing. The CDC has a good website on ticks: <http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/diseases/>

**Weather**: The weather can be extremely dangerous for a hiker. You should take care to track the weather before you hit the trail, and have a plan in case inclement weather erupts when you are in the middle of your hike. If you will be hiking far away from your vehicle, make sure you have a plan in place in case bad weather sneaks up on you. Make sure someone knows where you are in case the worst case scenario comes your way. Always be safe on the trail.