

CELEBRATE JULY 4TH SAFELY

By Jonna Jefferis

Bursting colors rain down in arcs across the sky, leaving behind a haze of pungent gunpowder. Loud booms and sharp pops pierce the night. Everyone loves Independence Day fireworks celebrations and the happy memories they create.

For some people, however, the celebration is cut short by a visit to the hospital emergency room. On average, 400 Americans lose vision permanently in one or both eyes due to fireworks injuries each year, according to the American Society of Ocular Trauma. This is easily preventable by taking some common sense safety measures.

Every time you handle fire, whether it's to light charcoal at a cookout or to set off fireworks, there is potential danger. Most injuries caused by fireworks are from bottle rockets, sparklers, firecrackers and Roman candles.

If you live in an area where it is legal to set off your own fireworks, here are some suggestions to ensure a safe holiday:

Handling fireworks. Fireworks are very sensitive. Never experiment with them or try to make your own. Store fireworks in a cool, dry place.

Careful planning. The fireworks lighting area should be a safe distance from homes, trees and spectators. Keep a bucket of water or garden hose nearby in case of a mishap.

Lighting fireworks. Read the manufacturer's safety instructions on the package. Wear protective eyewear.



Ignite fireworks on the ground, one at a time, then immediately move away. Never set off fireworks in your hand or in a metal or glass container. Do not attempt to pick up or re-light “duds.”

Supervision. Never let children play with or ignite any kind of fireworks, including sparklers. Despite having a “safe” reputation, sparklers injure many children each year, especially those under 5 years old. A sparkler can burn at nearly 2,000°, hot enough to sear the cornea and cause permanent vision loss.

Clean-up. When the show is over, tell children not to pick up any leftover fireworks on the ground. Pour water over them, then toss them out.

Prevent Blindness America joins the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the National Association of State Fire Marshals in advising families to attend public fireworks displays instead of setting them off at private parties, in order to lower the risk of injury. Professional displays are much safer than private ones, but all fireworks are unpredictable. To stay safe:

- View fireworks from at least 500 feet away.
- Respect barriers set up to ensure your own safety and that of the pyrotechnicians.
- Follow all safety-related directions from show personnel, fire fighters or police officers.
- Don't touch unexploded fireworks. Instead notify show personnel or safety officers, who will ensure their safe disposal.

When you take the recommended precautions for handling and watching fireworks, you can relax and enjoy the holiday knowing that you and your family are safe. Let the fireworks begin!

Sources: American Academy of Ophthalmology, Medical College of Wisconsin, Prevent Blindness America

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