

Summer injuries can be prevented

Ever since the 1975 release of the movie “Jaws,” the biggest summer injury fear has been about what lurks beneath the ocean ready to bite.

The season is full of various traps for trauma, both in and out of the water, said Dr. Stephen Schenkel, head of Emergency Medicine at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore.

“People are outside more and they take more risks,” Dr. Schenkel said.

Land-borne dangers lurk around the home, most prominently the family’s lawn mower. Children often try to ride the back of hand-driven mowers, leading to serious injuries that Dr. Schenkel said “has become a whole cottage industry to itself.”

A 2007 report by the University of Missouri said 75,000 Americans suffer lawn mower injuries a year, with children making up 10,000 of those victims.

“You shouldn’t have small children around when you are mowing the lawn,” he added.

Dr. Schenkel recommended that only children 12 and older should use hand-powered mowers, while teens 16 and older are suitable for ride-on mowers. Dr. Schenkel said shoes should be worn at all times when a mower is in use.

July is also a month that sees a spike in accidents. Last year, 10,000 Americans, including 2,600 children, were treated in emergency rooms for firecracker-related injuries.

Vacations also send millions to the beach, where many drop their inhibitions.

Serious summer accidents suffered by prominent people often serve as wake-up calls for the public. One famous example is Tim Strachan, who played football for DeMatha Catholic High School in Prince George’s County in the early 1990s.

Mr. Strachan had scholarship offers from Penn State University and the University of Maryland heading into his senior season and was regarded as one of the top

quarterback prospects in the country.

During a Bethany Beach, Del., vacation with his family in August 1993, Mr. Strachan dove into an oncoming wave, but missed the crest. His head landed on the floor of the water, immediately paralyzing him.

Dr. Schenkel said his hospital does not have a trauma unit. He typically does not see cases like Mr. Strachan, but reckless behavior in local waters nonetheless leads to a surge in patients.

With the popularity of boating in Maryland, people often underestimate the immense dangers with controlling a boat, especially after drinking alcohol. He said a boating trip can turn serious very quickly.

"While people do remember to not drink and drive," Dr. Schenkel said. "They will have no problem getting behind the wheel of a boat after a few drinks."

Despite warnings and available education programs in Baltimore, he said that there are still many people who enter pools not knowing how to swim.

Drowning is the leading cause of accidental death among children ages 1-4 and the second-leading cause of deaths among children 14 and younger, according to Safe Kids U.S.A.

Customarily lazy summer months have the potential for danger, and Dr. Schenkel said simple improvement in decision-making can avoid trouble, both large and small. "Minor trouble," he added, "is much more the rule of the day."