

Bushwalking Victoria - Safety Bulletin



Bushwalking Victoria

towards better bushwalking

With the warmer weather well and truly in full force, there are several factors we all need to consider to ensure we remain fit, healthy and hydrated during the summer walking season. Below, we will cover the six main topics of importance, with many tips to keep you knowledgeable this summer!

Sun Exposure

Australia is known as the skin cancer capital of the world with more than 11,500 Australian men and women diagnosed with a melanoma each year. With an estimation of 434,000 people being treated for one or more non-melanoma skin cancers, skin cancer accounts for over 80% of all new cases of cancer diagnosed in Australia each year.

Luckily, skin cancer is almost entirely preventable and high profile awareness and information campaigns telling Australians how to save their skin have been in place for several decades, but there are still a lot of misconceptions about skin cancer and sun protection.

For best protection, the ARPANSA recommend following the measures below:

- Slip on some sun-protective clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
- Slop on a broad spectrum, water resistant SPF30+ (or higher) sunscreen. Put it on 20 minutes before you go outdoors and every two hours afterwards.
- Slap on a hat – broad brim or legionnaire style to protect your face, head, neck, and ears.
- Seek shade.
- Slide on some sunglasses – make sure they meet Australian Standards.



Dehydration

With respect to health and safety, not drinking enough water may well be the most common mistake made by bushwalkers. Whether you are walking in the heat or the cold, at sea level or at altitude, adequate hydration should always be a priority. The best way to prevent dehydration is to consciously drink water slowly over several hours before intense exercise. During periods of heavy exercise, you should drink about one and a half cups per hour. If your urine is clear and copious, then you know you are well-hydrated.

When the weather is brutally hot and your body sweats profusely, water by itself is not enough. Sweating out salts diminishes your body's ability to regulate liquids. Munching on raisins and peanuts, aka trail mix or another salty snack can help avoid this problem, but sometimes you need a little extra help. Sports drinks containing salts, potassium and electrolytes are effective at staving off this problem, but be wary of drinking too much since they often contain large amounts of sugar. In a quick pinch, a dash of salt and sugar can be added to a water bottle for similar results.

Before your walk, be sure to drink one or two cups of water, juice or a sports drink. Ensure that you are limiting the number of caffeine drinks you consume, as caffeine increases fluid loss. Also, avoid alcohol as it can cause dehydration. During your walk (especially when it's hot), ensure you drink at least 800 milliliters of fluid per hour. Continue drinking after bushwalking to replace any fluid losses - thirst always underestimates fluid needs, so drink more than you think is necessary.



Snakes

One of the common concerns many bushwalkers have in the heat of Australian summer is the risk of a snake bite. In reality, this risk is incredibly small. We most certainly do have some deadly snakes in Australia. However, part of the reason that we have relatively few snake-related deaths is that of the healthy respect that most people (especially those who have some outdoors experience) have for the reptiles. By respecting them and knowing a little bit about them, we can be a whole lot safer when we head outdoors.

The majority of those killed or injured by snakes in this country are bitten when they either accidentally step on a snake or try to capture (or kill) a snake. Which leads us into 3 simple tips for avoiding a snake-bite while bushwalking...

1. Leave them alone

It's illegal to injure or kill any of Australia's native wildlife, so don't even think about it. What would that achieve, anyway?

If you're bushwalking in the warmer months, there is a fair chance you will come across a snake at some point. It's hard not to freak out, but as long as you give them some space there's nothing to worry about. It's not like snakes are slithering around all sinister-like, looking for humans to kill. The best thing you can possibly do, as long as you're not too close when you see it, is to stand still and let it go about its business. It will get out of your way soon enough. They are very unlikely to strike unless they feel threatened.

2. Watch where you put your feet

This is probably the best piece of advice we can give you. Whether it be that you're looking up in the sky or at your map in front of you, you could be putting yourself at risk of walking on a snake. Always keep an eye on what's in front of you and make sure you look into the distance as well.

3. Cover your legs

Snakes are much less likely to successfully envenomate through a fabric of any kind, so pants are always preferable to shorts on a bushwalk. Gaiters are even better. The thicker the material, the more protected you are. Don't forget about your feet, either. Sturdy shoes or boots are a must on any wilderness excursion.

So next time someone asks you to go for a bushwalk, don't be put off by snakes. They're amazingly beautiful creatures, so if you get to see one you're very lucky. Statistically, even your significant other is more likely to harm you than a snake is.

Treatment

The principle of the treatment of snake bite is to reduce the amount of venom that reaches the bloodstream by applying firm pressure over the bitten area and minimizing movement by the victim. The lower leg is the most vulnerable to snakebite when bushwalking. If a member of the party is bitten:

- Immediately apply firm pressure over the bite site.

- Lay the victim down and keep them calm and at complete rest.
- Apply a broad firm bandage to the bitten area and around as much of the limb as possible, without removing clothing if this means moving the limb. Bandage as tightly as for a sprain and work up the limb to include the joint above the bite site.
- Immobilize the limb with a makeshift splint.
- Constantly observe the patient for shock and respiratory failure. Dispatch other member/s of the party with knowledge of your location to bring outside help to transport the patient.
- If external help is unavailable, the best option is probably to rest for a day or two, and then proceed to the nearest civilization taking care to minimize stress to the patient.

DO NOT deliberately disturb a snake.

DO NOT walk in sandals or thongs.

DO NOT cut or wash a bite - venom on bandages can be used to identify the snake, which is required to ensure the correct anti-venom is used.

DO NOT apply an arterial tourniquet.

If you yourself, or a fellow bushwalker encounter a snake bite, we highly recommend the use of 'Setopress' bandages. The link to this product is [here](#). As always, please ensure you have the Emergency app easily accessible on your mobile device. If you don't already have it, you can download it [here](#).



Holiday Travel

If you and your family are planning on doing some interstate bushwalks, or even walks that are a fair distance away, it's vital to ensure that your holiday travel is safe and relaxed. This includes working out the route you are taking, the amount of time to allow getting there (with regular rest breaks) and making sure your car is in good condition.

During long trips, drivers can feel tired and may be tempted to keep going to make up time, putting themselves, their passengers and other road-users at risk.

Further, holiday-makers often find themselves on unfamiliar roads and in different weather conditions, such as towing a caravan or driving in the snow. These types of situations require more concentration and extra care on the driver's behalf.

Long road trip checklist:

- Have your car serviced and given a proper safety check up.
- Map out your trip – make sure you allow plenty of time to get to your destination, including rest stops.
- Take regular breaks (at least once every two hours) and pull over for a power nap as soon you feel tired or fatigued.
- Share the driving if possible.
- Never drink alcohol, not even small amounts, before or during a long trip.
- Have a few good nights' sleep before heading off.
- Don't drive when you would normally be sleeping.
- Stay within the speed limit and always choose an appropriate speed for the driving conditions – whether city, country or night time driving.

- Make sure all passengers wear appropriate seatbelts or child restraints - including pets.
- Make sure all luggage is properly secured and won't become projectiles in the case of sudden braking.
- Avoid distractions – don't use mobile phones.



Bushfires

The warmer months are the perfect time to experience regional Victoria. However, Victoria is fire-prone. If you are hiking or camping between November to April in an area that is heavily forested, has thick bush or long, dry grass, or coastal areas with lots of plant life – you are at risk of fire. Follow these bushfire safety tips to ensure that your experience is safe and enjoyable.

During a fire, you can find out relevant information based on your location through listening to your local emergency broadcaster, check www.emergency.vic.gov.au or call the Vic Emergency Hotline - 1800 226 226.

- Avoid bushfire situations, where possible. If you're ever in doubt, U-turn to safety. If it is a hot, dry or windy day, plan your trip carefully. Avoid high bushfire risk areas, especially when walking. **DO NOT HIKE ON FIRE BAN DAYS.**
- Prior to your travel, create a checklist, which covers checking the weather forecast, check fire danger ratings for your location, review your plans, tell someone where you're going and **ALWAYS** pack an AM/FM radio or mobile phone.
- If there is a bushfire, stay calm - do not panic.

If you are in the car:

- If you can, U-turn to safety and leave the area.
- Do not get out and run - stay in the vehicle.
- Park in a large clear area, away from trees and long grass.
- Turn on headlights and hazards lights.
- Close windows and vents. Get below window level.
- Cover exposed skin with a dry woollen blanket.
- Wear dry, natural fibre clothing.
- When the fire has passed, get out of the car.

If you are outdoors:

- Seek refuge behind a rocky outcrop or high wall, in cave, gully or large animal burrow, in a large clear area away from trees and grass or in large dam or lake.
- Avoid slopes and hill tops - avoid being above a fire.
- Do not seek refuge in above ground tanks or above ground pools.
- Cover exposed skin with dry natural fibre clothing.

Lastly, please ensure you download the Vic Emergency app prior to leaving. If you don't already have it, the link is [here](#).



Ambulance Cover

Lastly, it's vital that we stress the importance of Ambulance cover to you all. Although most of us have private health insurance, not many are made aware that their policy may not cover everything that an Ambulance Victoria membership would cover. If you should require emergency services, you could still be left with a big bill.

Ambulance Victoria Membership cover gives you protection against the cost of world-class emergency treatment and transport services delivered by our highly skilled and dedicated paramedics and aided by state-of-the-art equipment and resources. Specifically, it includes:

- All emergency road ambulance transport.
- All MICA (Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance) attendance and treatment.
- All emergency air ambulance and clinically necessary non-emergency air ambulance.
- All ambulance treatment when transport is not required.
- The same level of cover for ambulance treatment and transport services provided interstate as are covered back in Victoria*.
- All clinically necessary non-emergency patient transport.

For a yearly membership, it's \$46 however, a full list of membership details and pricing is [here](#).



Ambulance
Victoria

One final reminder, If you're hiking remotely or alone, please ensure you carry a PLB (Personal Locator Beacon).

Be safe this Summer, Happy walking!

Disclaimer

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