

■ Lightning

Our region is at high risk for afternoon storms and lightning. If you see dark clouds approaching or hear thunder, clear the area immediately. If you see lightning, flee the area or seek safe shelter such as fully enclosed vehicles with the windows up, substantial buildings, or even ditches, low ground or clumps of bushes. AVOID trees, water, open fields and high ground!

If you feel your hair standing on end and/or hear “crackling” noises, you are in the lightning’s way and are in great danger. If caught outside during close lightning, immediately remove metal-containing objects, including baseball caps, helmets, walking sticks or backpacks. Place your feet together, duck your head, and crouch down low with your hands on your knees.

People who have been struck by lightning do NOT carry an electrical charge. They ARE safe to handle. Apply first aid immediately if you are qualified to do so, then get emergency help right away.



■ Sunburn

At high altitude there is less atmosphere to block the sun’s rays, so sunburns occur more often. Snow and water reflect the sun and intensify the effect. The sun’s harmful ultraviolet rays can’t be seen or felt, and are just as dangerous on overcast days as sunny days.

Protect yourself by minimizing direct exposure between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Look for sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB and has a high protection number such as 15, 30, or even higher. Apply it liberally every two hours.

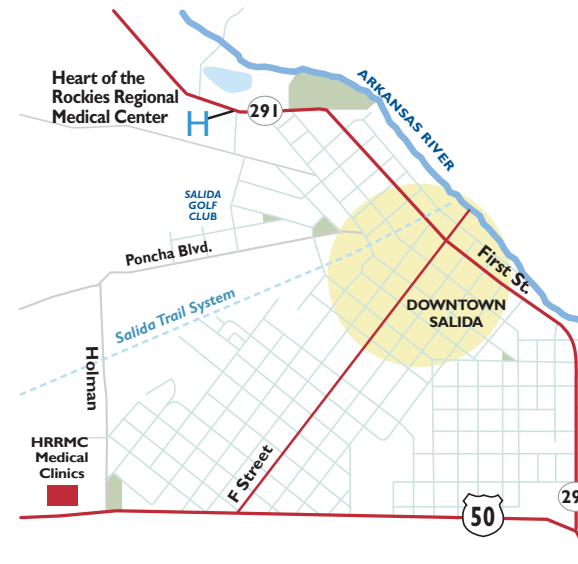
Babies and children are especially vulnerable to ultraviolet rays. Infants should not be exposed to the sun at high altitudes for more than a few minutes. It is safe to begin using sunscreen on children at six months of age, but they should only be allowed moderate exposure to the sun.

EMERGENCIES

For Life-Threatening Emergencies: Dial 911

Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center Emergency Department:
(719) 530-2250

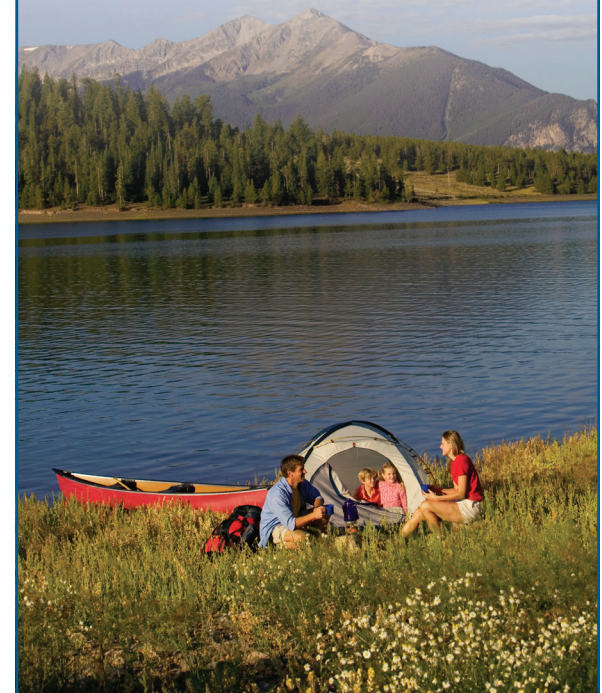
Main Hospital Number: (719) 530-2200
1000 Rush Drive, Salida, CO 81201
hrrmc.com



HEART OF THE ROCKIES
REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

The heart of healthcare

HIGH ALTITUDE HEALTH TIPS



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WELCOME

The Upper Arkansas River Valley is a wonderful playground for outdoor recreationists. Many visitors, however, are not fully aware of the special health considerations that high altitude brings.

Please take a minute to familiarize yourself with the tips we offer here. They will help you stay healthy and maximize your fun while visiting the high country.

If you have a medical emergency while here, dial 911!

If you become injured or ill during your stay, please go to our local hospital – Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center – or to a local clinic. The hospital’s Emergency Department is staffed by a physician and specially trained nurses 24 hours a day. Many of the clinics offer same-day appointments or extended hours, including weekend hours.

LOCAL CLINICS

First Street Family Health (719) 539-6637
910 Rush Drive, Salida

HRRMC Buena Vista Health Center (719) 395-9048
28374 County Road 317, Buena Vista

HRRMC Internal Medicine (719) 530-2204
1000 Rush Drive, Salida

Mountain Medical Center (719) 395-8632
36 Oak Street, Buena Vista

Salida Family Medicine (719) 539-3583
320 East First Street, Salida

■ Altitude Sickness

Elevations in the Upper Arkansas River Valley vary from over 7,000 feet in Salida to 8,000 feet in Buena Vista and over 14,000 feet on many of the area’s mountain peaks! The higher the altitude, the less oxygen there is in the air. Some people have negative reactions to this decrease in oxygen.

Symptoms of high-altitude sickness include nausea, headache, loss of appetite, insomnia, or drowsiness. Children may experience vomiting.

Prevention and treatment include frequent resting, staying at a lower altitude the first day of your stay, eating lightly, drinking more water, and decreasing smoking. Some over-the-counter medications may help. Avoid alcohol, as it may intensify symptoms. Contact a physician if breathing becomes difficult, headache continues and is accompanied by mental disturbances, coughing begins, or walking becomes staggered.

• Effects on Medical Conditions

The altitude may adversely affect people with chronic lung or heart disease. The decrease in oxygen that occurs at higher altitudes alters body functions, making it difficult to breathe and forcing the heart to work harder. Such individuals should avoid overexertion by moving at a slower pace. If problems continue, seek medical help.

• Effects on Alcohol and Medications

Use alcohol and barbiturates with caution; their effect is greater at high altitude. People taking anticoagulants (blood thinners) may notice an increased effect and may require prothrombin times (bleeding times) to be checked. Strong diuretics may cause blood pressure to fall, resulting in fainting or dizziness.

• Swelling

The causes for swelling at high altitude are unknown, but it goes away on its own several days after returning to a lower altitude. Diuretics and a low-salt diet help reduce swelling.

■ Dehydration

The lower oxygen level at higher altitudes causes increased respiration. This, combined with the dry mountain air, may lead to greater loss of body moisture. Alcohol consumption does the same thing. **Drink six to eight glasses of water every day to stay hydrated.**

Dehydration and the dry mountain air may also cause nosebleeds, which can be treated simply by pinching the nostrils shut together for at least five minutes.

■ Giardia

Visitors may be tempted to drink water from the crystal-clear lakes, rivers or creeks in the mountains -- BUT DON'T! These bodies of water may contain an intestinal parasite called Giardia lamblia, which causes diarrhea, nausea, cramping, fever and chills. Symptoms may not appear until you return home and require medical treatment.

Never drink water from water bodies until it has been boiled for 10 minutes, run through a water purification filter, and/or treated with tablets specifically designed for water purification.



■ Hypothermia

Hypothermia may result from being in cold water or in a cold environment for an extended time. Our rivers and creeks include snow runoff, which is very cold. Cold water cools the body’s temperature 32 times faster than air.

Be sure to take warm clothes and to dress in layers when traveling in the backcountry or on day hikes. Don’t be fooled by warm days with blue skies; summer weather can change quickly from warm to cold conditions. Risk of hypothermia increases with injury, alcohol or drug consumption, and for children and seniors.

A person with hypothermia may be confused. Attempt to reorient him or her. Rewarm a wet victim by removing wet garments and replacing with dry. Cover the person with blankets. A rescuer might also lie alongside the victim underneath covers to increase body heat and assist in rewarming. The victim should only be moved gently.