

IDPH Recommends Experiencing The Eclipse With An Eye Toward Safety

by James Leach
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SPRINGFIELD – With large crowds expected to converge on Southern Illinois in the days ahead to experience the total solar eclipse on April 8, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is offering suggestions on how to view the eclipse safely.

“A total solar eclipse is a rare and remarkable event,” said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “Everyone in the eclipse’s path is set for a truly memorable experience and we, in public health, want to ensure it is a safe one as well. Please make sure you, your family, and friends take appropriate precautions this coming Monday, April 8th to avoid any injury or illness.”

The April 8 total eclipse will follow a path similar to the August 2017 total eclipse. This time, people across a wide swath of Southern Illinois will be in total darkness for just over four minutes. It will be the last total eclipse over the United States until 2045.

IDPH and its Office of Preparedness and Response are working to remind the public about potential dangers associated with the eclipse and to ensure they take all appropriate precautions. That begins with eye safety – attempting to directly observe the eclipse without eye protection could cause permanent damage. Standard sunglasses do not offer protection, no matter how dark, and are not safe for viewing the sun. To directly view the eclipse, people must use special [safe eclipse viewers](#) which meet the [ISO 12312-2](#) international standard. Check the link to see if your eclipse viewers meet this standard.

Another way to safely view the eclipse is indirectly via [pinhole projection](#). With your back to the sun, you can look at the shadow from the eclipse on the ground through a hole punched in an index card, an object with small holes like a pasta colander, or your fingers crossed over each other.

The large number of visitors expected into the path of totality -- including Carbondale, Herrin, McLeansboro, Albion, and other communities -- could also mean extensive traffic congestion. IDPH recommends travelers have a safety kit in their vehicle in case they wind up stranded, potentially for hours. That kit should include non-perishable food, water, and any needed medications.

With many people planning to camp in the area leading up to the eclipse, there are other safety considerations to keep in mind. These include the possibility of severe weather – a not-uncommon occurrence this time of year. In addition, those who are hiking in the area are advised to stay to marked paths. Rocks and ledges in outdoor areas can become very slippery in the spring weather conditions, increasing the risk of a serious fall.

With the increased tourism and outdoor events, more people will be recreating around bodies of water. Some will even view the eclipse from the bodies of water (e.g., from boats). In addition to general awareness of the potential risk of drowning, it's important to recognize the longest period of totality will be 4 minutes and 28 seconds, in comparison, drownings can occur in as little as 30 seconds. It is fast, and it is silent. Be alert and take precautions.

Another thing to keep in mind: food trucks may be set up to meet the needs of visitors, but it's important to be sure you're getting food from facilities that have been properly inspected by the local health department and meet all sanitary guidelines.

Additionally, while many people may choose to celebrate the eclipse with alcohol or other intoxicants, it is best not to indulge to excess. There are concerns about a heightened risk of overdose among people coming into the area for the eclipse. IDPH is working with local health departments and other agencies to make sure there is an adequate supply of naloxone on hand to counteract the effects of an opioid overdose. IDPH has also arranged for naloxone to be kept on site at more than 20 state parks within the path of totality. Visitors to state parks who need naloxone can obtain it from Illinois Conservation Police officers onsite.

Also, a team of 22 volunteer personnel from the Illinois Medical Emergency Response Team (IMERT) are being deployed to Lawrence County to be available to assist in the event of a medical surge incident during day of the solar eclipse and the weekend prior. The team includes two physicians, nurses, paramedics and specialists in communications and logistics. The team will set up a temporary medical treatment site on the campus of Lawrence County Memorial Hospital, working in conjunction with hospital staff, the Lawrence County Health Department, and the Lawrence County Emergency Management Agency.

IDPH encourages everyone to enjoy the unique experience of a total eclipse, but to do so safely and wisely.