

Sunscreen and Sun Protection

Sunscreen and sun protection are very important for children and adolescents. Skin cancer is becoming more common in young people. Protecting your child's skin from too much exposure to the sun can greatly reduce this risk. Sunburn during childhood has been linked to a higher risk of developing skin cancer. Sunburn is a sign of skin damage that you can see, but invisible damage occurs too, in all skin types.

There are two types of sun rays that are harmful to the skin:

- UVA rays cause skin aging and skin cancer, such as melanoma.
- UVB rays cause sunburns, cataracts, and also contribute to skin cancer.

Types of Sun Screen to Use

The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends that all kids wear sunscreen. Make sure the sunscreen has these characteristics:

- Broad spectrum, which protects against UVA and UVB sunrays.
- Water-resistant sunscreens can no longer be labeled as “waterproof.” Sunscreens are now labeled as water resistant for up to 40 to 80 minutes.
- Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.

Check the front label and the ingredient label of the sunscreen. The product you choose should include one of these ingredients:

- titanium dioxide
- zinc oxide
- avobenzone

These tend to be thicker, but provide better protection for the skin.

How to Apply Sunscreen

- Apply to all exposed skin at least 30 minutes before going outside.
- Reapply every 2 hours **and** after water exposure, such as swimming or sweating.
- Reapply the sunscreen when outdoors in both sunny and cloudy weather. Sun rays still come through the clouds and can still affect the skin.
- Check the expiration date of the sunscreen. If the sunscreen has changed in color or consistency, you should throw it away and get new sunscreen.

Other Ways to Protect Your Child's Skin

Your child can do these things:

- Wear hats, sunglasses and other sun-protective clothing
- Stay in the shade
- Avoid being outside between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the sun's rays are the strongest
- Get Vitamin D safely through a healthy diet. Ask your doctor if you have questions about healthy sources of Vitamin D.

Check your child's skin regularly. Look carefully all over the skin for new moles or changes in the skin. Talk to your child's doctor about any changes you see. Read Helping Hand HH-I-199, *Moles*.

Protecting Young Babies and Infants

Infants have delicate skin and are more sensitive to the effects of sun exposure and heat. Sunscreen has not been extensively tested in young babies; therefore the AAD discourages use of sunscreen for those less than 6 months of age.

- Dress your infant in a hat and long sleeves and pants, using light fabrics in warm weather.
- Use car carriers and strollers with wide sun shades.
- Make sure to keep your child well hydrated and avoid overheating. Regular feedings with formula or breast milk should provide enough liquid if you are keeping baby cool.
- Keep your baby in the shade.
- For babies over 6 months, use chemical-free sunscreens and sunblocks that rely on ingredients that are physical blockers such as zinc oxide or titanium oxide. These are considered safe in this age group.

Warning about Tanning Beds

Avoid tanning beds. Tanning beds and lamps use UV radiation that damages the skin and suppresses the immune system. This increases the risk of premature aging, wrinkling, leathery skin and melanoma. These effects occur years later but can be extensive.

The UVA light that is used in tanning beds and lamps is less likely to cause burns but cause deeper skin damage. The risk of damage, aging and skin cancer increases with each tanning bed use. Self-tanning products give the skin a tan look without UV exposure. Sun screen should still be used.

Sun Exposure in the Winter

Sunscreen is even useful in the winter because snow can reflect UV radiation from the sun and UVA light penetrates through windows. You may want to use a sunscreen on your child if he or she is outside for an extended period of time during these months.