



## Sun Safety

We all need some sun exposure; it's our primary source of vitamin D, which helps us absorb calcium for stronger, healthier bones. But it doesn't take much time in the sun for most people to get the vitamin D they need, and unprotected exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause skin damage, eye damage, immune system suppression, and even cancer. Even people in their twenties can develop skin cancer.

Most kids rack up between 50% and 80% of their lifetime sun exposure before age 18, so it's important that parents teach their children how to enjoy fun in the sun safely. With the right precautions, you can greatly reduce your child's chance of developing skin cancer.

### Facts About Sun Exposure

1. **UVA** rays cause skin aging and wrinkling and contribute to skin cancer, such as melanoma. Because UVA rays pass effortlessly through the ozone layer (the protective layer of atmosphere, or shield, surrounding the earth), they make up the majority of our sun exposure. Beware of tanning beds because they use UVA rays. A UVA tan does **not** help protect the skin from further sun damage; it merely produces color and a false sense of protection from the sun.
2. **UVB** rays are also dangerous, causing sunburns, cataracts (clouding of the eye lens), and immune system damage. They also contribute to skin cancer. Melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer, is thought to be associated with severe UVB sunburns that occur before the age of 20. Most UVB rays are absorbed by the ozone layer, but enough of these rays pass through to cause serious damage.

What's important is to protect your family from exposure to UVA and UVB, the rays that cause skin damage.

You should be especially careful about sun protection if your child has one or more of these high-risk characteristics. Also, not all sunlight is "equal" in UV concentration. The intensity of the sun's rays depends upon the time of year, as well as the altitude and latitude of your location. UV rays are strongest during summer. Remember that the timing of this season varies by location; if you travel to a foreign country during its summer season, you'll need to pack the strongest sun protection you can find.

Extra protection is also required near the equator, where the sun is strongest, and at high altitudes, where the air and cloud cover are thinner, allowing more damaging UV rays to get through the atmosphere. Even during winter months, if your family goes skiing in the mountains, be sure to apply plenty of sunscreen; UV rays reflect off both snow and water, increasing the probability of sunburn.

### Protecting Kids From the Sun

With the right precautions, kids can safely play in the sun. Here are the most effective strategies:

#### Avoid the Strongest Rays of the Day

First, avoid being in the sun for prolonged times when it's highest overhead and therefore the strongest (normally from 10:00 AM until 4:00 PM in the northern hemisphere). If kids are in the sun between these hours, be sure to apply protective sunscreen — even if they're just playing in the backyard. Most sun damage occurs as a result of incidental exposure during day-to-day activities, not at the beach.

Even on cloudy, cool, or overcast days, UV rays travel through the clouds and reflect off sand, water, and even concrete. Clouds and pollution don't filter out UV rays, and they can give a false sense of protection. This "invisible sun" can cause unexpected sunburn and skin damage. Often, kids are unaware that they're developing a sunburn on cooler or windy days because the temperature or breeze keeps skin feeling cool on the surface.

#### Cover Up

One of the best ways to protect your family from the sun is to cover up and shield skin from UV rays. Ensure that clothes will screen out harmful UV rays by placing your hand inside the garments and making sure you can't see it through them.

Because infants have thinner skin and underdeveloped melanin, their skin burns more easily than that of older kids. But sunscreen should **not** be applied to babies under 6 months of age, so they absolutely must be kept out of the sun whenever possible. If your infant must be in the sun, dress him or her in clothing that covers the body, including hats with wide brims to shadow the face. Use an umbrella to create shade.

Even older kids need to escape the sun. Long exposure can make them feel tired and irritable. For all-day outdoor affairs, bring along a wide umbrella or a pop-up tent to play in. If it's not too hot outside and won't make your child even more uncomfortable, you can have him or her wear a light long-sleeved shirt and/or long pants. Before heading to the beach or park, call ahead to find out if certain areas offer rentals of umbrellas, tents, and other sun-protective gear.



### Use Sunscreen Consistently

Lots of good sunscreens are available for kids, including formulations for sensitive skin, brands with fun scents like watermelon, long-lasting waterproof and sweat-proof versions, and easy-application varieties in spray bottles.

What matters most in a sunscreen is the degree of protection from UV rays it provides. When faced with the overwhelming sea of sunscreen choices at drugstores, concentrate on the SPF (sun protection factor) numbers on the labels.

For kids age 6 months and older, select an SPF of 15 or higher to prevent both sunburn *and* tanning. Choose a sunscreen that states on the label that it protects against both UVA and UVB rays (referred to as "broad-spectrum" sunscreen). To avoid possible skin allergy, avoid sunscreens with PABA, and if your child has sensitive skin, look for a product with the active ingredient titanium dioxide (a chemical-free block).

For sunscreen to do its job, it must be applied correctly. Be sure to:

- Apply sunscreen whenever your child will be in the sun.
- Apply sunscreen about 30 minutes before kids go outside so that a good layer of protection can form. Don't forget about lips, hands, ears, feet, shoulders, and behind the neck. Lift up bathing suit straps and apply sunscreen underneath them (in case the straps shift as a child moves).
- Don't try to stretch out a bottle of sunscreen; apply it generously.
- Reapply sunscreen often, approximately every 2 to 3 hours, as recommended by the American Academy of Dermatology. Reapply after a child is sweating or swimming.
- Apply a waterproof sunscreen if kids will be around water or swimming. Water reflects and intensifies the sun's rays, so kids need protection that lasts. Waterproof sunscreens may last up to 80 minutes in the water, and some are also sweat- and rub-proof. But regardless of the waterproof label, be sure to reapply sunscreen when kids come out of the water.

Keep in mind that every child needs extra sun protection. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends that all children — regardless of their skin tone — wear sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Although dark skin has more protective melanin and tans more easily than it burns, remember that tanning is also a sign of sun damage. Dark-skinned children can also develop painful sunburns.

### Use Protective Eyewear for Kids

Sun exposure damages the eyes as well as the skin. Even 1 day in the sun can result in a burned cornea (the outermost, clear membrane layer of the eye). Cumulative exposure can lead to cataracts later in life (clouding of the eye lens, which results in blindness). The best way to protect eyes is to wear sunglasses.

Not all sunglasses provide the same level of ultraviolet protection; darkened plastic or glass lenses without special UV filters just trick the eyes into a false sense of safety. Purchase sunglasses with labels ensuring that they provide 100% UV protection.

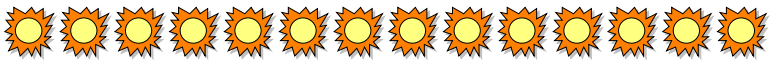
### If Your Child Gets a Sunburn

A sunburn can sneak up on kids, especially after a long day at the beach or park. Often, they seem fine during the day but then gradually develop an "after-burn" later that evening that can be painful and hot and even make them feel sick.

If the sunburn is severe and blisters develop, call your doctor. Until you can see your doctor, tell your child not to scratch, pop, or squeeze the blisters, which can become easily infected and can result in scarring.

### Taken in part from:

Dowshen, Steven. "Sun Safety." *Outdoor and Seasonal Safety*. September 2007. Kids Health. 27 Mar 2009 <[http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid\\_safe/outdoor/sun\\_safety.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/outdoor/sun_safety.html)>.



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- **Ready to Learn**—June 17th at The Utah County Health Dept., Rm. 1601 from 12-1 p.m. Bring your children and learn about the fun ways you can make reading, math, and science enjoyable for your young ones. Receive a complimentary book, & remember to RSVP at 422-1807.
- **Car Seat Safety Class**—June 9th at 10 am, and June 19th at 4:30 pm. Utah County Health Dept., Rm. 2601.
- **Spanish Ready to Learn**— June 10th, at The Utah County Health Department, Rm. #2501, from 5:30– 7:00 p.m. The topic will be Play.
- **Explore the Born Learning Trail**- there are seven throughout Utah County . For location of Born Learning Trails see [www.unitedwayuc.org/welcomebaby](http://www.unitedwayuc.org/welcomebaby)
- **Provo City Library**- “**Book Babies**” every Friday from 10-10:30 a.m. for infants 0-12 mos. “**Mother Goose Time**” every Friday from 11-12pm for 1 year olds. Age appropriate songs, stories, and activities for baby and their parents/caregivers. For more info: <http://www.provo.lib.ut.us> (Go to “Programs & Events”-

