



Sun Safety for Children

How much harm do children face from the sun?

Human exposure to increased Ultraviolet (UV) levels can result in sunburns, skin cancers, cataracts and other eye diseases. Some researchers have shown that exposure to UV radiation can also affect the immune system.

The sun can also cause premature aging and damage to skin. Much of our exposure to UV rays occurs before we are 18 years of age. By the time we are adults, many of us soak up more than enough ultraviolet rays to cause skin cancer. By protecting children from the sun, you can significantly reduce their risk of developing skin cancer.

How can I protect my children from sun exposure?

Keep unprotected toddlers and children out of the sun during the peak hours of 10 am to 4 pm. Make sure that their pre-school or school schedules keep them indoors as much as possible during these times. Try to schedule sports and outdoor activities in the early morning or late afternoon. When you are outside, look for trees and other naturally shady areas for children to play.

What about clothing?

Encourage your children to be “sun-smart”. Make sure that they cover up with appropriate clothes. Closely-woven material offers natural protection from the sun. If you can see through the clothing easily, then UV rays can get through too. A long-sleeve shirt and pants are the best clothes to protect the skin. A broad-brimmed hat is recommended. Avoid baseball caps that do not shade the ears or back of the neck.

How important is sunscreen?

Dermatologists strongly recommend a sunscreen with SPF 30 or more and UVA protection if you and your children are out in the sun. Use a lip balm with SPF 30 as well. Use products approved by the Canadian Dermatology Association.

For best results, apply sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before exposure to the sun so it is absorbed by the skin and less likely to rub or wash off. Apply the sunscreen lotion according to instructions and every couple of hours. Swimmers and those who sweat heavily should use a waterproof lotion.

For children wearing bathing suits, make sure that sunscreen is applied up to and under the edges of the suit to protect sensitive areas, such as the upper thighs and chest. Pay particular attention to the tops of feet and the backs of the knees. Be careful when applying sunscreen near the eyes. These products can be irritating so avoid the upper and lower eyelids.

Babies are especially sensitive to UV radiation and heat. Do not expose babies less than 1 year of age to any intense, direct sunlight – for example, during the middle of the day.

Sunscreen is not recommended for babies under 6 months of age.

Sunscreens, like many other products, have a limited shelf life and become less effective over time. Check the expiry date of old sunscreen containers and replace them if they are out of date.

What about sunglasses?

The same UV rays that harm the skin can also cause injury to the eyes. Babies and children are particularly at risk. Standards for sunglasses have improved, and most brands are effective at screening or reflecting ultraviolet light. Look for sunglasses that provide 99 to 100 per cent UVA and UVB protection.

When buying sunglasses, see how well they cover the eyes. Large lenses, glasses that fit well, and a wrap-around design all help protect against damaging UV rays. Have your clear plastic or glass corrective lenses checked for UV protection.

Other Risks

Be extra careful with children who are fair or who have blond or red hair. They are more likely to burn easily and most at risk of developing skin cancer later in life.

Most of the sun's damaging UV rays can penetrate light cloud cover and haze, so remember to protect your child even if it is cloudy or does not feel hot. Rays from the sun reflect off many of the surfaces around us. Up to 80 per cent of the sun's UV radiation can be reflected off snow. Concrete, sand and water reflect less than 20 per cent. Children always need to be "sun-smart" whether they are skiing, swimming, playing or walking outdoors.

For more information, see HealthLink BC File# 35 Heat-related Illness.

Tips to Increase Sun Safety

You can use these tips to increase sun safety:

- Protect skin from the sun every day from late spring to early fall.
- Protect your skin from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.
- Do not expose babies less than 1 year of age to any intense, direct sunlight usually from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Wear long-sleeved shirts, pants, a hat and sunglasses.
- If you have to go out in the sun without protective clothing, use sunscreen. Do not forget to apply it to ears, nose, and neck.
- Sunscreen is intended to enhance protection during periods of sun exposure – not to increase time of sun exposure.
- A tan does not provide enough protection against the sun's rays. Actually, having a tan means that your skin has been damaged already by UV radiation.
- Help teach children to be "sun-smart" and to protect themselves against exposure to the sun.
- Indoor tanning or using sun lamps damages your skin the same way that UV from the sun does.



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