

Cancer Prevention: Sun Safety

Sun Safety Tips for Parents

Everyone enjoys warm weather and sunshine, but too much sun, especially as a child, can damage eyes and cause skin cancer later in life.

Most exposure to the sun happens during the first 18 years of life. Sunburns are not only painful, they are dangerous. Sunburns can cause dehydration and fever in kids. Just one sunburn as a child doubles the risk of developing melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer.

People with fair skin, who usually burn and do not easily tan, or individuals with blonde or red hair, freckles, or many moles, are at greatest risk of sun damage.

Prevent damage by reducing your child's exposure to the sun, especially when the UV index is 3 or higher.

Simple sun safety tips

- Limit time in the sun, especially between 11 a.m.-3 p.m., when the sun's rays are strong.
- Keep children less than one year old out of direct sunlight as much as possible.
- Protect children by using a covered stroller, cradle or sun umbrella.
- Use clothing as a barrier from the sun's rays. Dress your child in loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirt and longer shorts or pants. Tightly-woven materials are best.
- Use a wide-brimmed hat to shade your child's ears, face, and neck.
- Apply an SPF 30 sunscreen to **all** areas exposed to sun. If a child burns using a SPF 30 sunscreen, try a higher SPF.
- Do **not** apply sunscreen around a child's eyes. It may sting and burn. Use UV-protective sunglasses.
- Do **not** apply regular sunscreen to a child's lips. Use an SPF 30 lip balm.
- If taking medicine, check with your child's health-care provider or pharmacist to see if it will cause an increased risk of

sunburn.

- Make sun protection a habit. Set a good example by protecting yourself as well.

Combine these steps for the best protection. Sunscreen is a valuable tool to protect you from the sun's rays, but it does not give total protection. Use natural protection (i.e. shade, clothing, and hat) as the first choice for sun protection.

Cooler in the shade

Look for shaded areas or create shaded areas for outdoor activities. Teach your child to look for and use shade made by trees, buildings, and porches. Even cloudy days can produce sunburns. Up to 80% of the harmful rays go through haze, light clouds and fog.

Sunscreen

Ask your pharmacist for the best sunscreen for your child's skin type and needs. Pick one that protects against UVA and UVB with an SPF 30 or higher. Always test sunscreen for allergic reaction. Apply a small amount to your child's arm and check for any reaction (i.e. redness, itching, and/or swelling) up to 48 hours later.

Apply a generous amount of sunscreen 20-30 minutes before your child goes outdoors. Make sure skin is dry when applying the sunscreen or the skin will not absorb it. Do not forget the upper back, tips of the ears, nose and neck. Cancers most often occur in these areas.

Re-apply sunscreen as directed on the bottle or after sweating, water sports, or toweling off. If your child swims, use a water-resistant sunscreen.

Special considerations for babies

Babies have very thin skin and sunburn easily. Avoid all sun exposure for babies less than one year of age. If this is not



an option, talk with your child's health-care provider about using sunscreen on your baby.

Contact your health-care provider immediately when a baby under the age of one year gets sunburn – severe sunburn is an emergency in babies.

For more information on sun safety call Lambton Public Health at 519-383-8331, toll free 1-800- 667-1839 or visit www.lambtonhealth.on.ca

Sources: The Canadian Cancer Society; Canadian Dermatology Association; World Health Organization; Canadian Skin Cancer Foundation; National Steering Committee on Content for Sun Safety Messages