

# Preventing sunburn

## What is sunburn?

Sunburn is damage to the skin that happens a few hours after sun exposure. It is caused by ultraviolet radiation (UV rays) from the sun.

## Why should I protect my child from sunburn?

The sun's rays are harmful. Sunburn can age the skin. This causes wrinkles, freckles, moles, blotches, drying and leatherness of the skin. It can also cause skin cancer. Almost all skin cancer is from too much exposure to sun. Sun exposure in early childhood increases the risk of getting skin cancer later in life. Many people believe that sun is needed for Vitamin D. You should get Vitamin D through diet and supplements instead of the sun.



## What tips should I follow?

To protect your child when outside, follow these tips:

- Infants under 6 months of age should not use sunscreen. They should be kept out of the sun completely.
- Seek shade whenever possible. Use umbrellas or sit under a tent.
- Have your child cover up with a wide brim hat (2 inch brim), long sleeves, rash guards or pants when possible. Any clothing worn outside or in the water should have a minimum SPF of 50.
- Have your child stay out of the sun during midday hours. The sun's rays are the strongest between 10am and 2pm.
- Use a sunscreen that has a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 30. This blocks most of the sun's rays. A sunscreen with a higher SPF may block slightly more of the sun's rays, but no SPF will block 100% of the sun's rays. Sunscreen should also have both UVA and UVB coverage. It is often labeled as "broad spectrum".
- Look for sunscreens with active ingredients of titanium dioxide and zinc oxide and those that are fragrance-free.
- Put sunscreen lotion on at least 20 minutes before your child goes outside. Be sure to put it on all exposed areas of skin. This includes the face, back of the neck, ears, nose and feet. Do not get it in the eyes or on eyelids.
- Wear sunglasses with 100% UV protection. This will help prevent sun damage to eyes and eyelids.
- Lips can become sunburned. Apply Chap Stick or lip balm with 30 SPF.
- Many sunscreens are water resistant, not waterproof. Reapply the sunscreen at least every 1½ hours. Put on more often if your child is swimming or sweating.
- Use at least one ounce (about the size of a half-dollar) of sunscreen. Using less than that can reduce the sunscreen's protection.



### Tips (continued)

- Teenagers with acne can use a sunscreen that is oil-free and non-comedogenic. This sunscreen does not cause blemishes or pimples.
- Check the expiration date of the sunscreen you are using. Do not use sunscreen if it is past the expiration date.
- Keep sunscreen out of the sun and heat. Sun and heat can break down the chemicals in the lotion.
- Spray sunscreens can provide coverage from UV rays, but be careful not to let your child breathe it in as you are spraying. When using a spray sunscreen, make sure to apply it outdoors. When applying to your child's face, spray the sunscreen on your hands and then apply it to their face.
- Some surfaces can reflect sunlight and cause sunburn. These include sand, water, cement and snow. Even on cloudy or hazy days, the sun's radiation can still burn your child.
- Set an example for your child by using sunscreen and staying covered when out in the sun.
- Some sunscreen has ingredients in it that are thought to stop the reproduction and growth cycles of ocean corals. Environmental experts suggest sunscreens that are free of oxybenzone when swimming in the ocean.
- Keep sunscreen out of reach of young children.

### What should I do if my child gets sunburn?

If your child's skin gets burned, do the following:

- Give your child water or juice. This helps to replace body fluids your child has lost.
- Give ibuprofen if your child is in pain or has a temperature over 101°F (38.3°C).
- Dab a light moisturizing lotion on the burned area. Do **not** put rubbing alcohol on the skin.
- Apply over the counter hydrocortisone cream. This helps reduce swelling and redness.
- Your child may take a bath in clear water that is cool to the touch.
- Keep your child out of the sun until the sunburn heals.



**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child:

- Is under one year old and is sunburned. This is a medical emergency. **Call your child's doctor immediately.**
- Has severe pain or blistered skin.
- Is much more tired than normal.
- Has a temperature over 101°F (38.3°C).
- Has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.**