

Prevention - Children

Prevention is the key to reducing the proliferation of skin cancer. Understanding the proper steps to prevention is critical to ensure the best protective measures are taken. Being sun smart is important at all ages and it is especially critical to instill these practices at an early age. Not only will you help ensure the safety of your young ones, but help to spread the understanding and importance of sun safety.

Infants & Toddlers Sun Safety



Keeping infants and young children out of the sun as much as possible is very important during the first year of a child's life. Research shows that skin damage more than doubles from the age of 6 months to 18 months.* An infant or toddler's skin is very sensitive and is still in the process of developing, which makes them more susceptible to sun damage. A bad burn in a small infant can be very serious and have lifelong consequences. Regular use of sunscreen with an SPF of 15+ during the first 18 years of life can tremendously reduce the risk of skin cancer. However, before the age of three, sunscreen does not provide adequate protection for developing skin and the best protection is to keep sun exposure to a minimum.*

Infants (Less Than 6 Months)

Infants less than 6 months should be kept out of direct sunlight. However, when adequate clothing and shade are not available, parents may apply a minimal amount of sunscreen to small areas, such as the infant's face and the back of the hands. Choose a waterproof product that is moisturizing (not alcohol-based) and has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.

Cover Up

Unprotected baby skin can sunburn in 10 minutes or less. Therefore, covering up is an essential part to protecting your infant.

- Cover up your baby's supersensitive skin with a sun hat, long-sleeved shirt and long pants.
- Dark, thick fabrics provide better protection, but may overheat your baby in the summer.
- In the water, put a t-shirt on your baby. After getting out, a dry shirt should be used, as wet fabrics decrease the ability to protect against harmful rays.

- Once your baby is 6 months old, use a sunscreen with a SPF of at least 15.
- Limit baby's sun exposure as much as possible during the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun is at its strongest. SEEK SHADE!
- Keep sunscreen, shirts, hats and umbrellas handy so you are always prepared to be outside and protect your baby.
- For a newborn, a carriage with a hood is preferable to an upright stroller. With an infant or toddler, use a canopy stroller or get an attachment.
- Beware of surfaces that reflect the sun. Sand, snow, concrete and water can reflect as much as half the sun's rays onto your child's skin. Merely sitting in the shade or under an umbrella does not guarantee protection. You still need to cover-up with protective clothing.
- Cover up on cloudy days. The sun's rays can be as strong on cloudy, hazy days as they are on sunny days.
- Remember that sunscreen provides protection, but does not mean that you are able to stay in the sun for a longer period of time.
- Set the example - don't forget to cover up and use sunscreen yourself!

*Information taken from the Massachusetts Melanoma Foundation

Toddlers/Pre Schoolers

Helpful hints to using sun safety with toddlers and pre schoolers:

- Play connect the dots! Place dots of sunscreen on children's bodies and have them connect the dots by rubbing in the sunscreen.
- Have children apply the sunscreen themselves.
- Give children lots of praise and positive reinforcement.
- Give children a sticker every time they put on sunscreen.
- Some children enjoy putting sunscreen on when it's treated like make-up.
- Let children put sunscreen on you.
- Make the application of sunscreen a regular part of their morning routine.
- Brush teeth, put on sunscreen, get dressed, brush hair, eat breakfast, etc.
- Sing a nursery rhyme while applying sunscreen.
- Ask the children where you should put the sunscreen. Let them squeeze the bottle. Give them some control.
- Make it fun!

Child Sun Safety

Childhood sunburns can increase your child's risk of developing skin cancer as an adult. Even a suntan is harmful to children. Tanning is an outward sign to internal skin damage. Research shows that much of the damage to skin is done in the first 18 years of life. Protecting skin and eyes during the first 18 years can reduce the risk of some types of skin cancer by up to 78%. Melanoma is a cancer of younger people and can start as early as adolescence.

Youth and Skin Cancer

- 50% of lifetime exposure to UV light occurs during childhood and adolescence

- It can take less than 10 minutes for a child's skin to burn
- Severe childhood sunburns are at an increased risk for skin cancer
- Being sun safe is the first step to reduce the chances of getting skin cancer later in life
- A person born today is twice as likely to develop malignant melanoma compared to someone born only a decade ago and 12 times more likely as someone born 50 years ago.

*Information taken from the National Coalition for Skin Cancer Prevention www.sunsafety.org

Teach Children Sun Safe Habits

Children learn healthy habits best at a young age. Therefore, it is important to begin protecting your children from the beginning and teaching them the importance of sun safety. With sun damage accumulating over a person's lifespan, beginning sun safety habits at a young age should be a priority.

- Maximize protection between the hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Wear sun protective clothing including long sleeved shirts and pants made of tightly woven fabric.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat that protects head, face, ears and neck. If a baseball cap is worn, make sure to use sunscreen on ears and neck.
- Wear UV-protective sunglasses with 99%-100% UV absorption.
- Seek SHADE. During peak sun hours (10-4pm) seek shade. Shadow rule- if your shadow is shorter than you, the sun's rays are at their strongest and you should seek shade.
- Encourage children to play in shaded areas, especially during peak sun hours.
- Use a sunscreen of SPF 15+ and apply a generous amount (about a palmful) and apply 30 minutes before going outside.
- Reapply Sunscreen every 90 minutes or after swimming, towel drying or perspiring, even if the label says the product is waterproof. Don't forget the lips and ears- both areas can burn just as easily!
- Strongly discourage the use of tanning beds.

* Information taken from the Massachusetts Melanoma Foundation www.massmelanoma.org www.cancer.org and American Cancer Society

Teach Your Children the Meaning of SHADE

Sunglasses. Always wear sunglasses with UV ray protection

Hats. Always wear a wide brim hat made from a close weave fabric

Always wear protective clothing, long sleeved shirts and pants

During the peak sun hours of 10 - 4 reduce exposure to the sun -stay in the shade

Every 90 minutes reapply sun block with at least a SPF of 15