

Family SUN Safety

Picnics, parks, and pools are all great for summer fun, but they can also be a problem for sun exposure. Children can get too much sun whenever they are outside - in the backyard or on a trip to the farmer's market. Just a few serious sunburns can increase a child's lifetime risk of skin cancer, the most common cancer in the US. Skin needs protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays any time children are outside.

What we know

While it's important to play it safe with sun exposure any time of year, it's especially critical during the summer when more skin is exposed for longer periods of time.

Everyone, regardless of skin color, is at risk for skin cancer: People with fair skin that freckles or burns easily are at the greatest risk. However, everyone - even if they tan or have naturally darker skin - is at risk and should learn to be sun safe.

UV radiation can go through thin clothing, windows, and clouds: UV rays can reach skin through a car windshield or a picture window. Sun protection is important on cloudy or hazy days as well as on bright sunny days.

Children need protection from UV radiation early in life: The effects of sun exposure are cumulative, so everyone needs serious sun protection from birth through their adult years. Unprotected skin can be damaged by UV rays in as little as 15 minutes.

What you can do

Hide (from the sun) and seek (the shade).

- During the summer, it's smart to stay out of the sun, especially during the middle of the day when UV rays are the strongest and most harmful.
- Seek shade under a tree, large umbrella, or pop-up tent. Remember that UV rays can also reflect off surfaces like water, cement, and sand.

Cover up from head to toe and slip on sunglasses too.

- Clothing and hats can keep the UV rays from reaching the skin. Choose clothes that are made from tightly woven fabric. Hats should have wide brims.
- Shades are cool - and they protect eyes from UV rays (which also increase the risk of cataracts later in life). Choose wrap-around glasses that block both UVA and UVB rays.

Splash on the sunscreen and reapply often.

- Like the other methods of sun protection, sunscreen reduces damage from UV rays, but does not eliminate it. Use sunscreen under clothes and hats - and even in the shade.
- Use a sunscreen of at least 30 to 45 SPF (sun protection factor). Apply thoroughly and reapply every 2 hours, and after swimming or sweating.