

FTC FACTS for Consumers

PROTECTING KIDS FROM THE SUN



It's never too early to save your skin — or your children's — from the sun. The sun produces invisible rays — ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) — that can cause short- and long-term skin damage.

The immediate effects of harmful sun rays — sunburn, photosensitive reactions (rashes), and cell and tissue damage — are bad enough. But medical experts believe that too much exposure to the sun in childhood or adolescence is a major cause of skin cancer and premature skin aging later in life. Health experts also believe that UVA may weaken the immune system.

You can take steps early and often to minimize the sun's harmful effects. Using sunscreens and sun-protective clothing can reduce your children's risk of skin damage later in life. It's important to understand the labeling information on sun protection products and shop carefully before heading to the beach, tennis court or park. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) carefully monitors advertising claims in this area and offers this information to help you make wise purchasing decisions.

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Sunscreens

Sunscreens provide some protection by blocking the sun's rays on the skin. They are labeled with a sun protection factor (SPF): the higher the SPF, the greater the protection against harmful sun rays. But no sunscreen totally blocks the sun's rays. Even people wearing high SPF sunscreens get some exposure. To minimize the damage:

- Use water-resistant sunscreens that help protect skin from both UVA and UVB rays and that have SPF numbers of at least 15.
- Apply sunscreen liberally (at least one large handful) about 30 minutes before going outside. No matter what sunscreen product is used, reapply it after swimming, toweling or any vigorous activity that causes heavy perspiration. Toweling off can remove even water-resistant sunscreens.
- Talk with camp counselors and others with child care responsibilities about reapplying sunscreens after children play hard, perspire or swim.
- Remember to apply sunscreen to children's skin even when they are under a beach umbrella. The sun's rays can reflect off surrounding concrete or sand.

Sun-protective Clothing

Sun-protective clothing is another way to help protect children from the negative effects of the sun. Sun-protective fabrics differ from typical summer fabrics in several ways. Sun-protective fabrics typically have a tighter weave or knit, and usually are darker in color. And, garments made with these fabrics generally have a label listing the garment's Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) value, that is, the level of protection the garment provides from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. **The higher the UPF, the greater the UV protection.**

The UPF rating indicates how much of the sun's UV radiation is absorbed by the fabric. For example, a fabric with a UPF rating of 20 allows 1/20th of the sun's UV radiation to pass through it. This means that this fabric will reduce your skin's UV radiation exposure by 20 times *where it's protected by the fabric*.

Garments with a rating over UPF 50 may be labeled UPF 50+; however, these garments may not offer substantially more protection than those with a UPF of 50. Also, a garment should not be labeled "sun-protective" or "UV-protective" if its UPF is less than 15. In addition, sun-protective clothing may lose its effectiveness if it's too tight or stretched out, damp or wet, and has been washed and worn repeatedly.

Protecting Kids

To help protect children from the sun's damaging effects:

- Remember the sun is strongest from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Schedule children's outdoor activities accordingly.
- Dress children for maximum protection. Hats with brims and tightly woven, long-sleeved shirts and pants offer the best defense. Look for the UPF to ensure sufficient protection.
- Select sunglasses that help screen out both UVA and UVB rays. UV rays may contribute to the development of cataracts. Sunglasses that are close-fitting and have big lenses offer more protection.
- Keep babies younger than six months out of the sun. Sunscreens may irritate baby skin, and an infant's developing eyes are especially vulnerable to sunlight.
- Teenagers who work outside as lifeguards, gardeners or construction workers may be at special risk for skin damage, and need

adequate protection before going out in the sun. Try to discourage teens from going to tanning parlors. Like the sun, tanning devices can damage the skin and eyes.

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in this country. Medical experts are diagnosing it more often than ever, especially in young people. They believe too much sun exposure in the early years may be responsible.

Two types of skin cancer, basal cell and squamous cell, usually are treatable if detected early. Basal cell often develops on the face, ears, lips and around the mouth of fair-skinned people.

Squamous cell usually appears as a scaly patch or raised, wart-like growth. Melanoma, another type of skin cancer, is the most dangerous. It can occur anywhere on the body. Early detection is crucial for successful treatment.

Factors associated with increased risk of developing skin cancer include:

- several blistering sunburns as a child or teenager;
- a family history of skin cancer;
- light-colored skin, hair and eyes; and
- moles that are irregular in shape or color.

For More Information

To learn more about skin cancer or skin damage, contact your family doctor, dermatologist, or:

Cancer Information Service (CIS)
1-800-4-CANCER
<http://cis.nci.nih.gov>

American Cancer Society (ACS)
1-800-ACS-2345
www.cancer.org

American Academy of Dermatology
P.O. Box 4014
Schaumburg, IL 60168-4014
www.aad.org

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint, or to get free information on any of 150 consumer topics, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357), or use the complaint form at www.ftc.gov. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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Federal Trade Commission
Bureau of Consumer Protection
Office of Consumer and Business Education

May 2001