

GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND PATIENTS

Sun Safety Tips

The sun brings warmth and brightness but it also poses health risks. Ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) light are invisible rays present all year round in sunlight. They can damage the skin resulting in wrinkles and, worse, skin cancer (melanoma).

The best way to protect yourself and your child against the sun's harmful rays is to know the facts and then take some common sense precautions.

Important sun facts

Time: The sun is strongest between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

Geography: The sun is most intense near the equator and at high altitudes.

Weather: Clouds and smog do not totally block UVA and UVB light from reaching the earth. Protection is required even on cloudy and smoggy days.

Reflectivity: Sand, water, cement, roads and snow reflect and intensify the sun's ray.

Skin type: People with fair skin and light eyes have little natural protection against the sun; people with dark skin have a greater degree of natural protection.

Protective measures

- Minimize sun exposure between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.
- Remember that sand, water, cement, roads and snow reflect the sun and increase the risk of sunburn.
- Wear protective clothing. A new white T-shirt has a sun protection factor (SPF) of only 5. Darker, tightly woven clothing offers greater protection.

Specialized clothing that offers even more protection can be purchased. A hat with a three inch brim is optimal for protecting the face and neck. A baseball hat does not protect most of the face or any of the neck.

- Keep babies out of direct sunlight whenever possible.
- Everyone should use a sunscreen or sunblock including a lip balm. (It is preferable for children younger than 6 months of age to use a sunblock.) Spray sunscreens can be used to protect exposed areas of the scalp.
- Sunglasses capable of blocking 99% to 100% of UVA and UVB rays are recommended.
- Do not rely on tanning beds for protection – they provide neither a “protective base tan or a “safe” tan.

Sunscreens and sunblocks

Sunscreens are chemical agents that bind with skin and reflect and absorb UVA and UVB light. Sunblocks are physical agents (“chemical free”) that reflect and scatter UVA and UVB light. Zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are examples of sunblocks.

Use broad-spectrum products (these offer both UVA and UVB protection) with an SPF of 15 or more. Apply 15 to 30 minutes before going outside. Use an adequate amount – one ounce covers the average adult body. Reapply every two hours and after swimming or vigorous activity. Waterproof (not water-resistant) products are recommended for swimming.

Sun avoidance and the use of protective clothing, including a hat, are the most important measures for children younger than 6 months of age. It is, however, safe to apply chemical-free sunblock to exposed area of the skin, such as the arms and face, in children this young avoid contact with the eyes.