



# Sun Safety for Babies and Children

Babies and young children have sensitive skin that can be easily damaged by ultraviolet radiation from the sun. You and your baby can sunburn in as little as 15 minutes. Skin damage caused by sunburn does not go away, even once the redness fades. One blistering sunburn during childhood can double the likelihood of that child developing skin cancer later in life.

Sunburn should be treated as an emergency for babies less than one year old. Talk to your health care provider immediately if this happens.

## Why Are Babies at Risk?

- Babies are not born with a developed skin protection system, so they burn more easily. Even children born to parents with deeply pigmented (dark) skin require maximum protection.
- Babies have more sensitive skin because the outermost layer of their skin is thinner.
- A young child has more skin, relative to his body mass, than an adult, so sunburns can be very serious.



- Babies are unable to tell you if they are too hot or the sun's too bright. Your baby may begin to cry and you won't know whether she's tired, hungry or hot.
- Babies cannot physically move themselves out of the sunlight. A six-month old on a blanket is less mobile than a one-year old who can toddle into the shade.

## Ways to Protect Your Baby's Skin

- **Do not apply sunscreen to a baby less than 6 months old.**
- Keep babies under one year out of direct sunlight to prevent skin damage and dehydration. Keep babies in the shade, under a tree, an umbrella or a stroller with a hood or canopy.
- Limit being outside for long periods between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., as the sun's UVB rays are strongest during this time period. Long walks are best in the early morning or late afternoon.
- Dress your child in comfortable long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and broad-brimmed hat. Tightly woven materials are best.

## Ways to Protect Toddlers, Pre-Schoolers and Older Children

- Use the UV index each day to plan outdoor activities.
- Try to avoid the sun during the peak hours of 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., but if you must send your kids out, make sure they are properly protected with sunscreen, long sleeves, hats and sunglasses.
- Use protective clothing and sunscreen anytime children are in direct sunlight. UV intensity is also increased from reflections off sand, snow, water and concrete.
- Advise teenagers that indoor tanning equipment should not be used.
- Work together with your child's daycare facility to ensure they have, and follow, a sun safety policy. Provide signed permission for your childcare provider to apply sunscreen to your child, and leave a bottle of sunscreen, labeled with your child's name, at the daycare centre.



### How to Choose and Use Sunscreen for Children

- Use a broad-spectrum product that protects against both **UVB** and **UVA** rays. The sun protection factor (**SPF**) should be a **minimum** of 15.
- If your child has particularly sensitive skin, test for an allergic reaction first before using the sunscreen all over the child. Apply the sunscreen to a small patch of skin on the inner forearm for several days in a row. If the skin turns red or otherwise reacts, change products.
- Whenever possible, apply the sunscreen 20 minutes before you go outside. Cover exposed areas generously, including ears, nose, the tops of feet and backs of knees.
- Reapply frequently and liberally, particularly after swimming or sweating.
- Provide teenagers with sunscreen lotion if they are going to be outdoors for extended periods during the summer. Make sure they understand the importance of using it.
- **NEVER** use baby oil to protect children from the sun. It will **NOT** protect them.
- Remember to protect yourself from the sun as well. Children learn best from your example.

### Helpful Websites:

[www.canada.ca](http://www.canada.ca)  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)  
[www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca)

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