



## Keep kids safe from sun's harmful rays

The sunny days of summer offer a chance for children to enjoy fresh air and be active outdoors. But excessive exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can pose long-term health risks – from wrinkles to cancer.

About 80% of sun exposure occurs before age 18. Damage to skin and eyes early in life can give rise to serious health problems in adulthood, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Therefore, it is important to protect your infant, child or adolescent from UV rays with sunscreen, protective clothing, hats and sunglasses.

Sunscreen should contain the words "broad-spectrum" on the label – it means the sunblock will screen out both ultraviolet B (UVB) and ultraviolet A (UVA) rays. Choose a product with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15.

The AAP offers the following tips to protect children from the sun:

- Keep infants younger than 6 months out of direct sunlight, protected by the shade of an umbrella or tree. When physical protection from the sun is inadequate, apply sunscreen to small areas of your infant's body, such as the face and hands.
- Make sure children always wear sunblock, protective clothing, sunglasses and a hat with the brim facing forward.
- Wet clothing does not offer adequate protection from the sun's rays.
- Be especially careful to help your child avoid sun exposure if he or she uses topical agents or takes medications that your pediatrician tells you make skin more sensitive to UV rays.
- Children and infants should wear sunglasses whenever they are in the sun long enough to get a tan or sunburn. For maximum protection, pick a pair that fits your child well, has large lenses and has been labeled to block UV rays.
- Try to avoid or minimize your child's sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are at their peak.
- Because clouds reduce UV rays by only 20% to 40%, kids should wear sun protection even when it's cloudy outside.

Finally, children learn by example, so parents should follow sun safety precautions themselves.

-Allison Bond  
June 2008, American Academy of Pediatrics