

Sun Protection

The facts

Most children accumulate between 60 percent and 80 percent of their lifetime sun exposure before age 18, so it is important that parents teach their children how to safely enjoy fun in the sun. Sun exposure is the main cause of skin cancer, the most common form of cancer in the United States. Though most skin cancers occur in older people, skin damage from yearly sunburns has a lasting effect, increasing your child's risk of skin cancer.

How does the sun cause skin damage?

Sunlight consists of invisible ultraviolet (UV) rays, which cause tanning, sunburns and other skin damage. Sunburns can also cause dehydration and fever. Too many sunburns and too much sun exposure over several years can cause skin cancer, wrinkles and possibly cataracts of the eye.

Who is at risk?

Children spend more time outdoors than most adults, especially in the summer. Research has shown that two or more blistering sunburns as a child or teen increase the risk of developing skin cancer later in life. Even children with darker skin tones are susceptible to skin damage and its long-term consequences.

What can I do?

Make sun protection a regular family event.

Here are some tips:

- **Sunscreen:** Choose waterproof sunscreen that is described as "broad-spectrum," meaning it protects against both UVA and UVB rays. Sunscreen should be at least SPF 15. Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outdoors, and remember to use sunscreen even on cool or cloudy days. Reapply sunscreen every 2 to 3 hours, or more frequently if swimming.

- **Attire:** Select clothes made of tightly woven fabrics which better protect skin. Have children wear a cap with a bill that covers their face and sunglasses with UV protection.
- **Limit midday sun exposure:** Try to keep out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest.

If your child gets sunburn, contact your pediatrician and keep your child completely out of the sun until the sunburn is fully healed.

How can UVA help?

At UVA Children's Hospital, caring for children is our specialty. We have more than 500 healthcare professionals dedicated to treating children in an environment specially designed for kids and their families. UVA Children's Hospital includes a pediatric emergency department, a state-of-the-art Newborn Intensive Care Unit, an intensive care unit, acute care facilities, the Kluge Children's Rehabilitation Center and an extensive network of primary and specialty care clinicians. Our goal is to get kids back to being kids.

For more information call 434.982.0808.