

Be Safety Savvy in the Sun!

By Max Nevarez Jr., M.D.
CSHP Family Practitioner

Sun protection is one of the most important things you can do for your child. Research shows that sun exposure prior to the age of 18 significantly increases the risk of developing skin cancer later in life, particularly melanoma, which is the deadliest form of skin cancer. The number one risk factor for skin cancer is unprotected and/or excessive exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Children with fair skin, freckles and moles, and those with a family history of skin cancer are at an increased risk. The good news is, over exposure to the sun is preventable!



Wearing hats and applying sunscreen will help protect your child from harmful UV rays.

It's good to review the following sun safety tips, and it is equally important for parents to set an example by taking these precautions as well.

- **Always** use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher, and reapply after swimming, perspiring, or two hours in the sun
- Wear clothing with tightly-woven fabric, changing when sweaty
- Wear a hat and sunglasses
- Stay in the shade when possible
- Avoid the strongest rays of the day, between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.
- Drink 5 oz. of water or sport drink every 30 minutes during activity

Infants have thinner skin and burn more easily than older children, but **sunscreen should not be applied to infants younger than 6 months**. Protect your infant from sun exposure by dressing him or her in clothing that covers the body, hats with wide brims, and creating shade with an umbrella or stroller with a canopy top.

Despite our best efforts, most children inevitably end up with a sunburn at some time in their lives. Skin irritation and redness from a mild sunburn can be relieved by having your child:

- Avoid additional exposure to the sun
- Take a cool (not cold) bath or apply cool, wet compresses
- Apply aloe vera gel or spray on over-the-counter “after-sun” sprays
- Avoid petroleum-based creams or lotions (these may hold heat inside the skin) and first-aid products with benzocaine (which may cause skin irritation)
- Drink extra fluids

Also discourage your child from scratching or peeling off loose skin, because the skin underneath is vulnerable to infection.

Severe sunburn and/or too much heat exposure can require medical attention. Contact your child's physician if he or she experiences:

- Sunburn that forms blisters or is extremely painful

continued next page

- Facial swelling from a sunburn
- Sunburn that covers a large area
- Fever or chills after getting sunburned
- Headache, confusion, or feeling faint
- Increased thirst or dry eyes
- Increasing redness, warmth, pain, swelling, or pus on the sunburned area

While typical Colorado summer days are filled with sunshine, it's important to remember to wear sunscreen on cloudy, overcast, and winter days as well. UV rays can travel through clouds, and it is exposure to these rays – not just sunburn – that increases the risk of skin cancer.

Tips excerpted from the American Academy of Pediatrics and The American Academy of Family Physicians



Max Nevarez Jr., MD
Family Medicine
CSHP East Branch
6340 Barnes Road
591-5500



CSHP • *Your Health. Your Future. Your Physicians.*

This article is provided for general information only, and is NOT a substitute for the medical care and advice of your physician. Copyright 2010. Colorado Springs Health Partners, P.C.