

Sun safety for children



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**Cooperative Extension
Education Resource**

By: The University of Florida Cooperative Extension

While enjoying the beautiful outdoors, parents need to protect their children and themselves from the sun's damaging rays. Just a few serious sunburns or even too much tanning over long periods of time can dramatically increase your child's risk of skin cancer later in life. One sunburn may double a child's risk for developing melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer.

Every year more than one million Americans, including children, are diagnosed with skin cancer and more than 10,000 will die from the disease. This is more than all other types of cancer combined. Even as skin cancer is becoming more common in children, only about one-third to one-half of children and their parents are taking even basic steps to prevent sun damage.

Health care experts recommend that parents take precautions to protect their children from too much sun:

- Keep children out of the sun between the hours of 11:00am and 4:00pm when the sun is strongest
- Dress children in clothing that covers them up – a long sleeved shirt, pants, and a wide-brimmed hat that shades the face, scalp, ears, and neck. In hotter climates like Florida's, a tee shirt, beach cover-up, and long shorts are also good choices when combined with plenty of sunscreen and staying in the shade as much as possible
- Provide sunglasses that protect your child's eyes from UV rays. Look for broad spectrum protection that blocks close to 100 percent of UVB and UVA rays, absorbs UV light, and wraps around the eyes
- Use plenty of sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 every time your child goes outside. Apply it at least 30 minutes before heading out and use it even on cloudy days. Make sure to apply a thick dose and remember to cover the backs of knees, ears, under the eyes, and the neck and scalp. Don't forget to re-apply every two hours or more after swimming or heavy perspiration. Even in cool and cloudy weather, children need protection
- If your child looks even a little pink, get him or her out of the sun to prevent further burning. It can take up to 12 hours for skin to show the effects of sun exposure
- Keep sunscreen handy. Fun things to do outdoors can come up unexpectedly, so be prepared

