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[Kids and sun safety: Doctors answer your top questions](#)

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According to the American Cancer Society, “Most of the more than 1 million cases of non-melanoma skin cancer diagnosed each year in the U.S. are considered to be sun-related.” Among the risk factors for developing skin cancer is having a severe sunburn as a child. With young one’s begging to visit the pools to get some much needed relief from the heat this summer, how can you protect them from harmful rays and ensure some summertime fun? Dermatologists answer all of your sun safety questions to keep you and your family protected this summer.



By Tracy B. McGinnis

“If youngsters or adolescents get a few bad sunburns, 15 to 20 years later they’ll have a 30- to 40-times increased risk for developing melanoma or other types of skin cancer,” explains Dr. Aaron Chevinsky, M.D., from the Allied Surgical Group in Morristown, NJ. “Fair skinned people are more at risk, but melanoma can affect anyone.”

Dr. Chevinsky says parents can protect their children by using sun blocks with an SPF of 30 or higher, keeping skin covered with lightweight fabrics and avoiding the intense rays the sun puts out at midday.

What is SPF?

“SPF means Sun Protection Factor which is an equation to give us sun protection,” explains Dr. Michael Gold, dermatologist and founder of Gold Skin Care Center, Advanced Aesthetics Medi Spa and The Laser and Rejuvenation Center located in Nashville, Tennessee.

“Between 0 and 30 there is really a lot of difference in SPFs, after that, it only changes a little.”

As a dermatologist, Dr. Gold urges people to wear sunscreen on a daily basis and suggest applying it at least 30 minutes before exposure, adding that it should be reapplied after activities and swimming.

“Often confusing the mix are the ingredients in sunscreens. While the back of a product may read like a science text book, it is agreed upon that Titanium Oxide and Zinc are ingredients good to see - and now a new compound called Mixoral may change how we look at SPFs because with it, the protection numbers are going increasingly higher, as the coverage level with these newer ingredients are helping protect the skin.”

Dr. Gold says the sunscreen you use should be “broad-spectrum” covering both the UVA and UVB rays. He explains that UVB rays are associated with what we know as sunburns, but UVA rays penetrate deeper and can be associated with more sun damage over time.

Do labels matter– body, face, baby?

“The specific kind of sunscreen is not that important (face or body),” explains Dr. Gold. “The face may be more moisturizing, but both should work fine for all areas. Baby sunscreen is a great marketing concept, but in truth, there is no real difference between them and normal adult sunscreens.”

Sunblock or Sunscreen?

Chicago dermatologist Dr. Brooke Jackson, founder of the Skin Wellness Center of Chicago, and mother to adopted twin baby girls, is always preaching safe sun care techniques to her patients and family members.

“Use sun block, not sunscreen,” says Dr. Jackson. “Sunscreen is like the screen in your windows, allowing penetration of some rays, about 89% filter.” Dr. Jackson explains that sun block is more protective. “It has physical blockers like titanium dioxide and will filter out about 97% of UV rays, giving maximum protection against the sun.”

How much SPF do you need?

“If you were going to burn in one minute and you put an SPF 30 on, that means it would take you 30 minutes to get the same amount of damage,” explains Dr. Jackson. “Be sure to choose an SPF of 30 on a daily basis. If you are heading out to the beach or park, go a bit higher like SPF 55 or 60.”

Dr. Jackson also agrees with other experts and says to keep clothes on. “A t-shirt has an SPF of 8, so it’s better than nothing. There are clothing lines, including swimsuits that have SPF protection built into the fabric.”

In addition to using SPF generously and often you can help protect your kids by seeking out shade, wearing sunglasses and hats in addition to t-shirts and sun protective clothing, and avoiding the sun during the hottest time of the day.

“For parents,” says Dr. Jackson, “Just like you talk to kids about not smoking and internet safety, talk to them about sun safety so they can have a lifetime of good health.”

For more online resources, check out the [American Academy of Dermatology’s Play Sun Smart website](#).