

SunSmart Tips for New Parents

Your baby's skin is extremely sensitive and will burn easily, by taking sensible sun protection precautions early on, you help reduce your baby's risk of developing skin cancer later on in life. Babies should not be purposely exposed to the sun when UV levels reach 3 and above. When UV levels are 'low' (under 3) sun protection can be relaxed, some direct sun exposure may help maintain vitamin D levels during this period, however if spending extended periods outdoors even when UV levels are low then sensible sun protection behaviour, like seeking shade is still recommended.

How the sun's UVR burns - it's what you can't see that matters!

The damage which leads to skin cancer isn't caused by the heat in the sun's rays, but by ultraviolet radiation or 'UVR'. UVR cannot be seen or felt on the skin. It comes directly from the sun, indirectly and is scattered from blue sky. UV radiation is also reflected by many surfaces, such as snow and sand.

The following practical tips will help protect your baby (and you) from over-exposure to the sun's UVR.

Role modelling

Young children often copy those around them and learn by imitation. Research shows that if adults adopt positive sun protection behaviors, the children in their care are also more likely to do the same.

Take care during "peak UV" radiation times

- Aim to minimise outdoor experiences and events between 11 am and 3pm during the daylight saving/summer period in Canberra- this is when UV levels are at their most intense.
- Organise your daily routine around the peak UV radiation times, especially during the daylight saving/summer period. For example, you can take a stroll early in the morning or late in the afternoon and try to focus on indoor activities in the middle of the day during the summer period. Remember sun protection may still be required if UV levels are still 3 and above.
- Parents and carers are encouraged to become familiar with the **Daily SunSmart UV Alert**. Remember that sun protection is recommended when UV levels reach **3 and above!** www.bom.gov.au/products/UV/Canberra_NSW.shtml

Hats and Clothing - Your FIRST line of defence

- For the best protection against UV radiation, you can dress your baby in loose outfits that cover their arms and legs. Natural fibres are usually the coolest however the closer the weave of the material the better the protection against UV radiation. However be careful about heat stress - make sure your baby is in a well ventilated area.
- When your baby begins to hold their head up, you can dress it in a soft legionnaire style hat, with a flap at the back that will crumple easily when they put their head down.
- When your baby learns to sit unaided, a soft legionnaire hat with a 'safe' tie under the chin would be the most practical. It's a good idea to get your baby used to wearing a hat as early as possible as they will be less likely to resist it when they are toddlers because it won't feel strange to them.
- Some clothing products carry an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) rating. This rating indicates the amount of UV radiation blocked by the fabric and the amount of UV radiation that passes through, it does NOT rate the style or design of the product!

Sunscreen - Your FINAL line of defence

- Many parents are concerned about the use of sunscreens on their baby. Sunscreen should always be seen as the final line of defence against UVR, and should be used only on those parts of the body that can not be covered by a hat and clothing such as the face, neck and hands, lower legs and feet etc.
- Buy a sunscreen that has an SPF (sun protection factor) of 30+ and is also labelled broad spectrum and water-resistant. Do not buy, or use, any sunscreen that is either past its use by date or does not have a use-by-date. It may be ineffective or even cause a skin reaction.
- Many brands of sunscreen include a formulation especially for infants. This sunscreen has no fragrance and has been especially developed to reduce the likelihood of a reaction. You might like to test the sunscreen on a small patch of your skin and your baby's skin before using it. Stop using a sunscreen immediately should you notice any reaction such as a rash, reddening or spots. Try other sunscreens until you find one that works best for your child.

Out and About with your baby – making use of shade.

- Try to actively **seek** shady places to sit with your baby when you're both out and about.
- You could pack the following items in your baby travel bag: a tube of sunscreen, a small sheet or blanket, a soft legionnaires hat (depending on the age of your baby) and perhaps a baggy romper suit which provides coverage for the legs and arms.
- If you are out driving in the car, remember to check how the sun is filtering into the car so you can shield your baby if they're in direct sunlight. There are vinyl 'static cling' window tints for cars (which stick to car windows and can be peeled off easily) and a number of other designs aimed to block UVR.
- When purchasing a pram or stroller, check if the hood position can be altered – so that it can be moved to block out the sun. Check if it comes with an adjustable canopy, other shade or portable umbrella that can be used for this purpose too.
- You can keep a dark coloured, compact umbrella in your car or baby travel bag so you always have something to use for shade.
- Try packing a beach cabana, sundome or beach umbrella in the boot of your car and keeping it there – that way it's always available for picnics, BBQs or visits to friends.
- Shop around for some sun protection items – you can buy sunglasses for children as young as six months; look for beach umbrellas, sundomes or cabanas and backyard shade structures etc.
- You can also keep a small light sheet in the pram so that it can be draped over the hood and bassinette of the pram to block out direct sunlight. It's best to only do this if you have no other alternative (like seeking the shade of a tree or verandah). You'll need to supervise this at all times to make sure the sheet does not drop onto the baby and that the pram remains well ventilated.
- Do not confuse 'shade' with 'shadow'! If you can see blue sky above you, you may still be exposed to direct UVR. The aim is to sit closer to the tree's trunk where there is good shade cover above you.

Sunglasses

- Sunglasses are not really practical or necessary for babies that are properly shaded and protected. However, good sunglasses are not a fashion item reserved only for the protection of adults' eyes. Your children's eyes need protection from the sun's UVR too.
- It's a good idea to get your baby used to the idea of wearing sunglasses early, you might start with sun goggles held on by elastic.
- When your baby becomes a toddler, look at the many styles of sunglasses on the market made that have been especially designed for young children. Look for designs that are close fitting, wrap-around and meet Australian Standard 1067, preferably marked EPF (Eye Protection Factor) 10. Make sure they are labeled a category 2, 3 or 4 and NOT 'fashion spectacles'.

What about Vitamin D and sun exposure?

Australia's high ultraviolet radiation levels mean that even when babies are outdoors for very short periods each day (say a few minutes before 10am and after 3pm) during the summer period with small amounts of skin exposed, they are likely to receive enough ultraviolet radiation exposure to maintain healthy vitamin D levels, even with the use of sun protection. Babies (and parents) should be able to maintain adequate vitamin D levels due to the daily 'incidental' sun exposure they receive. Small amounts of sun exposure are necessary for the body to maintain adequate vitamin D levels. Due to the very low levels of ultraviolet radiation in the ACT region in winter, Cancer Council ACT does not generally recommend sun protection around the June and July period in Canberra. In practice this means that the use of hats and sunscreen can be relaxed during this winter period or when daily UV levels are low (under 3). However, parents should still consider winter time sun protection if travelling north of Canberra or in the alpine regions, or if their children are particularly susceptible to sunburn or spending extended periods outdoors in the sun, say on a picnic.

During winter people *may* need about two to three hours of sunlight to the face, arms and hands (or equivalent area of skin) spread over each week to maintain adequate vitamin D levels produced during the summer period.

Dark skinned babies and babies of vitamin D deficient mothers are more likely to be at risk of vitamin D deficiency. These people should discuss their vitamin D status and needs with their medical practitioner.

Jaundice and Nappy Rash

Neonatal jaundice generally only causes concerns in about 10% of infants. Treatment for jaundice should be under medical supervision in a controlled environment. Exposing infants to direct sunlight is inappropriate to treat neonatal jaundice.

Appropriate recommendation for nappy rash includes frequent nappy changing, applying barrier creams to affected areas and exposing the inflamed area to the open 'air' as much as possible. The practice of exposing a naked infant to direct sunlight puts them at risk of sunburn and skin damage and therefore not recommended.