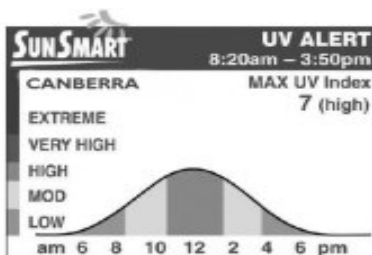


UVR Protection for Children

The sun exposure children receive while they are young increases their risk of developing skin cancer later in life. Protecting your child from over-exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun will reduce this risk. Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Australia and our skin cancer rates are the highest in the world. Over 1,700 Australians die each year from skin cancer despite it being one of the most preventable cancers.

How parents can protect their children from the sun's ultraviolet radiation.

- **Take extra care outdoors during the peak UV times (10am to 3pm)** – UV radiation levels are highest in the middle of the day and therefore your child's unprotected skin will burn more quickly during this period than in the early morning or late afternoon. UVR cannot be seen or felt. It is still possible to get burnt on cool or cloudy days. **Outdoor activities should be minimised as much as possible between 11am and 3pm during the daylight saving period in Canberra.** Particular care should still be taken when outdoors between 10am and 2pm during the remaining months. Remember sun protection is recommended when UV levels reach **3 and above** (refer to daily SunSmart UV Alert below).
 - **Use hats and clothing.** Children should wear broad-brimmed hats, bucket hats or legionnaire caps. Broad-brimmed hats should have a brim of at least 6 cm and bucket-hats should have a downward sloping brim of at least 5 cm **with** a deep fitting crown. Headwear that shades the face, neck and ears can reduce UV radiation to these areas by about 50 per cent. Children should also wear loose, comfortable clothing that protects the arms, legs, body and neck from the sun. Generally, the closer the weave of the fabric the better the protection from UV radiation.
 - **Be a SunSmart role model.** Children often copy those around them and learn by imitation. Parents and carers should adopt positive sun protection behaviours so the children in their care will be more likely to do the same.
 - **Encourage children to play in the shade.** Plant trees or erect temporary or permanent shade structures in the places where your child plays, or relocate activities, eg. wading pools and sand pits to under adequate shaded areas. Remember that UV rays can be reflected from many surfaces onto your child even when they're in the shade, so always use a combination of the 5 sun protection measures.
 - **Use an SPF 30+, broad spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen** on body parts not able to be covered by hats or clothing. Apply 15-20 minutes **before** going outdoors and reapply at least every two hours as sunscreen can be easily wiped or sweated off. Never use sunscreen as the only form of protection or to increase the amount of time you and your child would normally spend in the sun.
 - **Use sunglasses to protect your child's eyes.** There is a wide range of effective and inexpensive children's sunglasses available. Make sure they are designed to be close fitting that wrap-around the eyes. They should comply with Australian Standard 1067:1998 and carry a label stating EPF 10 (EyeProtection Factor rating 10) category 2,3 or 4. Suitable sunglass lenses should block out 100% of UV radiation.
 - **Ensure that SunSmart practices become a lifestyle habit for your child (and your family).** Remember that childhood protection decreases the chances of developing skin cancer later in life.
- Use the daily SunSmart UV Alert



The **SunSmart UV Alert** is issued by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) when the UV Index is forecast to reach **3 and above**, strong enough to damage unprotected skin and eyes and hence sun protection is required. In the ACT from the beginning of August to the end of May, UV radiation index levels reach 3 and above for part of or most of the day. The UV Alert is reported in the weather section of most daily newspapers across Australia, including The Canberra Times. Encourage older children to utilise this tool every day and become aware of when sun protection is needed.

Common Questions

I grew up playing in the sun. Now I hear it is wrong to let children play in the sun. What's the truth?

There is nothing wrong with children playing outdoors, but they must be protected from over-exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which causes sunburn and, in the long term, skin cancer. Be SunSmart and take extra care during the middle hours of the day.

Do children get skin cancer?

Melanoma in children is very rare, however it is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in young Australians aged between 12 and 24, with more than double the number of cases of any other kind of cancer. Research also reveals that over-exposure to UVR during childhood *and* adolescence is a major risk factor for the development of skin cancer later in life.

Isn't it true that UV radiation is good for my child's health and growth?

Everyone needs *some* UV radiation for the production of Vitamin D, however, in Canberra our UV radiation levels are high enough during August to May, that even when using sun protection, most of us get all we need from the 'incidental' exposure we receive from the sun each day. If however, you are concerned about your child's vitamin D levels, you should seek advice from your GP.

To me, my child looks and seems healthier with a suntan. Is this true?

While we used to think of a tan as being a sign of "good health" or wellbeing, it's not! In fact it's a sign of over-exposure to potentially dangerous UV radiation. Continued exposure damages and weakens the skin and increases the risk of skin cancer. ***There is no such thing as a healthy tan!***

Are any skin types immune to skin cancer?

No. While children with very pale skin are obviously more prone to sunburn, every child in Australia should be protected regardless of his or her skin colour and type. Naturally olive or tanned skin does not provide adequate protection from UVR.

Can I use sunscreen on my children?

Yes, but always in combination with clothing, hats, sunglasses and shade to provide the best possible protection. Babies and very young children should not have their whole body covered in sunscreen as this is ***not*** the best form of protection. Broad-spectrum SPF30+ (SPF=Sun Protection Factor) sunscreen should be used on small areas of skin that may not be protected by clothing or hat, ie. face, hands and feet etc. Zinc cream or lip screens can be used on sensitive areas such as the lips and nose for **extra protection**. Using a sunscreen will not stop the skin absorbing some UV radiation, even an SPF30+ sunscreen can still let some UV radiation through. While most SPF30+ sunscreens will protect the person wearing them for up to two hours, a stronger sunscreen doesn't mean that someone can stay out in the sun longer. ***Sunscreen should always be used in combination with the other sun protection measures.***

The active sunscreen 'chemicals' contained in infant sunscreens are the same as in 'regular' sunscreens however they tend to have less fragrance (a possible skin irritant) and some brands may have a slightly different base. You might like to test the sunscreen on a small patch of your child's skin before using it. "Toddler" sunscreens are designed for sensitive skin and tend to use a zinc oxide or titanium dioxide as the active ingredient. These agents act as a 'physical' barrier and work by reflecting the sun's UVR away from the skin.

When and where should I protect my kids from the sun?

Sunburn is caused by UV radiation and is not related to heat (infra-red light). The UV radiation, which burns our skin, is present every day of the year so you can get burnt even on a cloudy, overcast or windy day and also from the UV radiation reflected from sand, snow, water and light coloured surfaces. UV radiation is strongest during the daylight saving period of the year, however children in the ACT need sun protection for part of or most of the day from the **beginning of August until the end of May when UV levels are 3 and above.**

During the winter months of **June and July** sun protection is not generally necessary in the ACT, due to the 'low' UV radiation levels. Sun protection may still be necessary, if your child has very sensitive skin or certain skin conditions, or is spending time near reflective surfaces such as snow or water or extended periods outdoors. If you have any concerns about your child's skin please consult your doctor.

The SunSmart Early Childhood and National Schools Program

Cancer Council's SunSmart Program offers local childcare services and primary schools a nationally recognised SunSmart status for developing and implementing a comprehensive sun protection policy which acknowledges the environment, behavior and curriculum when it comes to sun protection.

If your child's service or school is not already part of the program or would like more information about joining the program contact Cancer Council ACT on 6257 9999 or simply visit us online to download an application form today.