

HSHS Illinois Encourages Staying Safe In The Sun With Sunscreen

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As we spend more time out of the house with outdoors activities such as spending time on the beach, hiking, swimming, etc., it is important everyone take steps to prevent sun damage on their skin. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can damage skin in as little as 15 minutes.

Following guidance from the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) and the CDC, the HSHS Illinois hospitals of HSHS St. John's Hospital in Springfield; HSHS St. Mary's Hospital in Decatur; HSHS St. Francis Hospital in Litchfield; HSHS Good Shepherd Hospital in Shelbyville; HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital in O'Fallon, HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital in Effingham; HSHS Holy Family Hospital in Greenville, and

HSHS St. Joseph's Hospitals in Breese and Highland offer the following answers to some of the most frequently-asked-questions about using sunscreen to stay safe in the sun.

Who should wear sunscreen?

Everyone above six months of age who will be spending any time outside (ideally, parents should avoid exposing babies younger than six months to the sun's rays). Sunscreen use can help prevent skin cancer by protecting you from the sun's harmful UV rays. Anyone can get skin cancer, regardless of age, gender or race. In fact, according to the AAD, it is estimated 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime.

Do I only need to put on sunscreen when it is sunny outside?

You should apply sunscreen every day if you will be outside. The sun emits harmful UV rays year-round and even on cloudy days, up to 80% of the sun's harmful UV rays can penetrate your skin.

What sunscreen should I use?

Everyone should use sunscreen that offers the following:

- Broad-spectrum protection that protects against ultraviolet A- and B-rays (UVA and UVB).
- Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 30 or higher.
- Water-resistant. (To make this claim, sunscreen manufacturers must specify whether it lasts for 40 minutes or 80 minutes while swimming or sweating.)

A sunscreen that offers the above helps to protect your skin from sunburn, early skin aging and skin cancer.

Is there a special sunscreen I should use for my toddler?

Sunscreen use should be avoided, if at all possible, in babies younger than six months (ideally, parents should avoid exposing babies younger than six months to the sun's rays). Parents of infants and toddlers six months and older may apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher to their children's exposed skin that is not covered by protective clothing, according to the instructions on product label, and reapplied approximately every two hours or according to the label directions.

Sunscreens that use the ingredients zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, or special sunscreens made for infants or toddlers may cause less irritation to their sensitive skin.

Broad-spectrum sunscreens protect against UVA and UVB rays. What is the difference between UVA and UVB rays?

Sunlight consists of two types of harmful rays that reach the earth — UVA rays and UVB rays. Overexposure to either can lead to skin cancer. All sunscreen products protect against UVB rays, which are the main cause of sunburn and skin cancers. But it is important to also protect against UVA rays, which also contribute to skin cancer and premature aging.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has regulations in place that requires any sunscreen on the market to meet FDA standards for both UVB and UVA protection before it could be labeled “broad-spectrum.” Products that aren’t broad-spectrum must carry a warning that they only protect against sunburn, and not against skin cancer or skin aging.

Is a higher SPF sunscreen better than a lower SPF sunscreen?

Dermatologists recommend using a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, which blocks 97 percent of the sun's UVB rays. Higher-number SPFs block slightly more of the sun's UVB rays, but no sunscreen can block 100 percent of the sun's UVB rays.

How much sunscreen should I use and how often should I apply it?

The AAD recommends that you apply enough sunscreen to cover all skin that clothing will not cover. Most adults need about one ounce — or enough to fill a shot glass — to fully cover their body.

Don't forget to apply to the tops of your feet, your neck, your ears and the top of your head.

Apply sunscreen to dry skin 15 minutes before going outdoors.

To protect your lips, apply a lip balm or lipstick that contains sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.

When outdoors, reapply sunscreen approximately every two hours, or after swimming, sweating or toweling off, according to the bottle directions.

Please also keep in mind that higher-number SPFs last the same amount of time as lower-number SPFs. A higher-number SPF does not allow you to spend additional time outdoors without reapplication.

Does sunscreen expire? Can I reuse the sunscreen I bought last summer?

Dermatologists recommend using sunscreen every day when you are outside, not just during the summer. If you are using sunscreen every day and in the correct amount, a bottle should not last long. If you find a bottle of sunscreen that you have not used for some time, here are some guidelines from the AAD that you can follow:

The FDA requires that all sunscreens retain their original strength for at least three years. Some sunscreens include an expiration date. If the expiration date has passed, throw out the sunscreen.

If you buy a sunscreen that does not have an expiration date, write the date you bought the sunscreen on the bottle. That way, you'll know when to throw it out.

You also can look for visible signs the sunscreen may no longer be good. Any obvious changes in the color or consistency of the product mean it's time to purchase a new bottle.

There are different types of sunscreens on the market – lotions, creams, ointments, wax sticks and sprays. What is the best type to use?

The type of sunscreen you use is a matter of personal choice and may depend on the area of the body to be protected. According to the AAD:

Creams are best for dry skin and the face.

Gels are good for hairy areas, such as the scalp or male chest.

Sticks are good to use around the eyes.

Sprays are sometimes preferred by parents since they are easy to apply to children.

When using spray sunscreen, make sure to spray an adequate amount and rub it in to ensure even coverage. Do not inhale these products or apply near heat, open flame or while smoking. (Current FDA regulations on testing and standardization do not pertain to spray sunscreens. The FDA continues to evaluate these products to ensure safety and effectiveness.)

There also are sunscreens made for specific purposes, such as for sensitive skin and babies.

Sunscreen products available in combination with moisturizers and cosmetics are convenient but should also be reapplied in order to achieve the best sun protection.

Sunscreen also may be sold in combination with an insect repellent. The AAD recommends purchasing and using these products separately — sunscreen needs to be applied generously and often, whereas insect repellent should be used sparingly and much less frequently.

Regardless of which sunscreen you choose, be sure to apply it generously to achieve the UV protection indicated on the product label.

Are there other ways to stay safe in the sun?

In addition to these sunscreen tips, please keep in mind that seeking shade under a tree, umbrella or other shelter, as well as wearing wide brimmed hats, sunglasses, and tightly woven clothing, or long sleeves and pants can protect you from UV rays.

Of course, you could always protect yourself by staying indoors, but during the summer months, that's no fun! You can have plenty of safe sun fun during the summer by taking these steps to protect yourself and your family.

For more information, visit the American Academy of Dermatology's Sunscreen Resource Center at <https://www.aad.org/sunscreen>.