

Sun Safety Tips to Prevent Damage from Harmful UV Rays

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O'FALLON, IL – 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.

The National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention has designated the Friday before Memorial Day, May 28, as National Sunscreen Day or to encourage sun safety awareness and to remind everyone to protect their skin while enjoying the outdoors.

Following guidance from the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) and the CDC, HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital offers the following answers to some of the most frequently asked questions regarding the use of sunscreen.

Who should wear sunscreen?

Everyone older than six months of age who will be spending any time outside. It is not recommended that children younger than six months old be exposed to the sun's rays for any length of time.

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 UV rays year-round and even on cloudy days, up to 80% of the sun's harmful UV rays can penetrate your skin. The reflection from sand, sun and even snow can increase the need for sunscreen.

What are Ultraviolet-A (UVA) and Ultraviolet-B (UVB) rays, and which are more harmful?

The sun's UVB rays are the most harmful to skin, contributing to skin cancer and premature aging. All sunscreens contain protection against UVB rays, but not all provide protection from damaging UVA rays.

What sunscreen should I use?

To protect your skin from sunburn, early skin aging and skin cancer, everyone should use sunscreen that offers the following:

- Broad-spectrum protection that protects against sunlight's ultraviolet A- and B-rays (UVA and UVB).
- Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 30 or higher.
- Water-resistant (effective for up to 40 minutes in water) or very water-resistant (effective for up to 80 minutes in water). Reapply after getting out of the water or sweating.

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% of the sun's UVB rays. Higher-number SPFs block slightly more of the sun's UVB rays, but no sunscreen can block 100% of the sun's UVB rays. A higher-number SPF does not allow you to spend additional time outdoors without reapplying.

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. Don't forget to:

- Apply to the tops of your feet, your neck, your ears and the top of your head.
- Apply to dry skin 15 minutes before going outdoors.
- Protect your lips, apply a lip balm or lipstick that contains sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.
- Reapply sunscreen approximately every two hours, or after swimming, sweating or toweling off.

Does sunscreen expire?

Yes. If you find a bottle of sunscreen that you have not used for some time, here are some guidelines from the AAD:

- The FDA requires that all sunscreens retain their original strength for at least three years.
- If the expiration date has passed, throw the sunscreen out.
- If you buy a sunscreen that does not have an expiration date, write the date of purchase on the bottle.
- Look for visible signs the sunscreen may no longer be effective – discoloration or change in the product's consistency.

In addition to these sunscreen tips, you can also protect yourself from the sun's rays by limiting time in direct sunlight, using an umbrella for shade, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses and wearing long sleeves and pants.

For more information, visit the American Academy of Dermatology's [Sunscreen Resource Center](#).

HSHS St. Elizabeth's is the only American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer designated cancer program in St. Clair County. To learn more, visit steliz.org/cancer.