



An important message for parents, carers and educators

Outdoor play and physical activity is essential for the health and wellbeing of young children. It is also very important that children are protected from overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun when they are outdoors.

What do we know about the effects of UV radiation on a child's skin?

Young children have sensitive skin that is particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of overexposure to UV radiation. Children have an underdeveloped immune response which means that their skin has less natural protection than adult skin and can burn very quickly.

Research also indicates that frequent unprotected sun exposure during childhood increases the risk of skin cancer later in life. The cumulative nature of sun damage indicates that babies and children should be protected from exposure to UV radiation from the day they are born.

What can parents do?

There are a number of steps that parents, carers and educators can take now to protect young children from the sun and reduce their future risk of skin cancer. When UV levels are 3 (moderate) or above, a combination of sun protection measures are required. UV levels are usually 3 or above all year round in Queensland.

- **Slip** on clothing that covers as much skin as possible such as shirts with collars and longer sleeves and longer shorts, skirts and dresses. Choose cool, loose fitting clothes made from closely woven fabrics. Some fabrics have a UV protection factor (UPF) rating. The higher the UPF, the greater the protection provided by the fabric. If possible, choose fabrics that are at least UPF15 (good protection), but preferably UPF50 (excellent protection).
- **Slop** on broad spectrum water resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or above. Sunscreen should be applied 20 minutes before going outside and reapplied every two hours or more often if your child is swimming, or if the product has been wiped or washed off.



- **Slap** on a broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire style hat so the face, neck and ears are protected. For young babies, choose a fabric that will crumple easily when they put their head down. Consider the hat's size and comfort, the amount of shade it provides to the face, if it will obstruct vision, hearing or safety. Hats that can be adjusted at the crown are best. If the hat is secured with a long strap and toggle, ensure it has a safety snap, place the strap at the back of the head or trim the length so it doesn't become a choking hazard.
- **Seek** shade. Set up outdoor play activities in shaded areas. Use a pram shade cover for prams and strollers and a shade cover for the car windows.
- **Slide** on sunglasses, if practical, to protect the eyes. Look for sunglasses that are labelled AS/ NZS 1067 and are a close fitting, wraparound style that covers as much of the eye area as possible. Some infant sunglasses have soft elastic to keep them in place. Toy or fashion-labelled sunglasses do not meet the requirements for sunglasses under the Australian Standard and should not be used for sun protection.

Sun damage and young children

What about babies under 12 months?

It is recommended that babies under 12 months are not deliberately exposed to direct sun when UV levels are 3 or above. If sun exposure is unavoidable, babies must be protected using a combination of sun protection measures.

Exposing babies to direct sun is not recommended to treat jaundice or nappy rash as it can place them at high risk of sunburn and skin damage.

Jaundice causes concern in about 10% of babies and should only be treated under medical supervision in a controlled environment.

For skin affected by nappy rash, recommendations include frequent nappy changing, applying barrier creams to the affected areas and exposing the inflamed area to the open air as much as possible – but never to direct sun.

The importance of role modeling

Children often copy those around them and learn by imitation. If adults adopt sun protection behaviours, the children in their care are more likely to do the same. Role modeling SunSmart behaviour is important for your health and for your child's health.

Handy hints

- Avoid planning outdoor activities during the middle of the day when UV levels are more intense. Instead, schedule outdoor play early in the morning or later in the afternoon.
- When buying a pram, look for one with an adjustable handle to change the direction your baby is facing to avoid direct sun exposure. Also check that the hood can be adjusted, so that it can be moved to block out the direct sun.

- When travelling, use a shade visor over the side windows in the car. Side and back windows don't offer as much protection as the front windscreen.
- Pack your own portable shade when going out – take an umbrella or beach cabana.
- Try using a toddler sunscreen that might be more appropriate for sensitive skin.
- Remember that UV radiation can reflect off surfaces such as sand, grass and concrete, so even if babies and children are in the shade, they will still need to use other forms of sun protection.
- Don't forget that UV radiation can penetrate through clouds, so sun protection is required even on cloudy days.

The UV Index tells you how strong the UV will be during the day.



To check daily sun protection times download the free:

- SunSmart UV Alert app on any iPad, tablet device or on your smartphone.
- SunSmart UV widget onto your website.
- Or check UV at www.bom.gov.au/uv/

Remember to check the SunSmart UV Alert and protect yourself when UV is 3 (moderate) or above.

Cancer Council Queensland's SunSmart retail store stocks a variety of sun protection products.

Call the SunSmart store on 1300 363 433 (toll free), email sunsmartshop@cancerqld.org.au or visit cancerqld.org.au/shop to find your nearest store.

Disclaimer: The information in this publication should not be used as a substitute for advice from a properly qualified medical professional who can advise you about your own individual medical needs. It is not intended to constitute medical advice and is provided for general information purposes only. Information on cancer, including the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer, is constantly being updated and revised by medical professionals and the research community.

Your use of the information in this publication is at your own risk. To the fullest extent permitted by law, Cancer Council Queensland does not accept any liability for any reliance placed on information that is not correct, complete or up to date, or that is not suited to the purpose for which it was relied upon. If any warranty or guarantee cannot by law be excluded, then, to the extent permitted by law, Cancer Council Queensland's liability for such warranty or guarantee is limited, at Cancer Council Queensland's option, to supplying the information or materials again or paying the cost of having the information or materials supplied again.

Last updated: Aug 2018