

# Sun Safety for Everyone

Summertime fun almost always involves getting outside and enjoying the beautiful weather. But it's important to remember to protect yourself and loved ones from the sun's potentially harmful effects.

Start off by trying to stay out of the sun during the peak hours of UV radiation, which are most intense in the morning and afternoon. These rays go right through window glass and can penetrate deeply into the skin. These rays can cause temporary and permanent skin

changes, including premature aging, wrinkling, skin damage, and sometimes skin cancer. Although individuals with darker skin do not sunburn as easily, they can still get skin cancer. So, it's important to use sun protection, no matter your skin colour.

Find shade if you need to be outdoors. You can also find how much UV exposure you are getting by using the shadow rule. If your shadow is longer than you, UV exposure is low. If your shadow is shorter than you, UV exposure is high.

## Protect yourself!

You can start by wearing protective clothing. This can include:

- Wide-brimmed hats that protect the face and neck
- Tightly woven clothes made of thick material, such as unbleached cotton, polyester, wool, or silk
- Dark clothes with dyes added that help absorb UV radiation
- Loose-fitting long-sleeved clothes that cover as much of the skin as possible
- Clothes with a sun protection factor (SPF) in the fabric that doesn't wash out

Sunscreen is a key element to protecting your skin, but it's important to use it year-round, both on cloudy and clear days. Wear a sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher every day and use sunscreen



that blocks out both UVA and UVB radiation. Apply to all exposed skin, including the nose, lips, ears, scalp, back of the hands, and neck. Ensure you are applying 30 minutes before going into the sun, and re-apply every two hours and after swimming, exercising, or sweating.

Use protective lip balm or cream that has an SPF of 30 or higher to protect your lips from getting sunburned. Wear wraparound sunglasses and choose ones that block at least 99 per cent of UVA and UVB radiation.

Be careful when you are on sand, snow, or water because these surfaces can reflect 85 per cent of the sun's rays. Avoid artificial sources of UVA radiation, including sunlamps and tanning booths which, like the sun, can cause skin damage and increase the risk of skin cancer.

### Selecting the right sunscreen for you

If you can't avoid being in the sun, use a sunscreen to help protect your skin while you are in the sun. Sunscreens come in lotions, gels, creams, ointments, and sprays.

Here's how to choose the right sunscreen:

- Read the sunscreen label.
  - Be sure that the sunscreen has a SPF of at least 30 or higher.
  - Be sure that the sunscreen is "broad-spectrum." This type of sunscreen protects the skin from ultraviolet A and B (UVA and UVB) rays.
  - Check the expiration date on the sunscreen. Do not use the sunscreen after its expiration date. The ingredients in the sunscreen may not work as they should after that date.
  - Follow the directions on the label for applying the sunscreen. Doing so will make sure that the sunscreen works well to protect your skin from the sun's ultraviolet rays.
- Consider your situation.
  - If your skin is sensitive to skin products or you've had a skin reaction (allergic reaction) to a sunscreen, use a sunscreen that is free of chemicals, para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA), preservatives, perfumes, and alcohol.
  - If you're going to have high exposure to the sun, consider using a physical sunscreen. These sunscreens, such as zinc oxide, will stop most of the sunlight from reaching the skin. They are usually thick white or coloured cream. They prevent the skin from being exposed to the sun's ultraviolet rays. They are useful for high-risk areas such as the nose, lips, and shoulders.
  - If you need to use sunscreen and insect repellent with DEET, don't use a product that combines the two. You can apply sunscreen first and then apply the insect repellent with DEET. But the sunscreen must be reapplied every 2 hours.



- If you are going swimming or are sweating, use a sunscreen labelled "water-resistant." The label will say if the sunscreen protects you for 40 minutes or 80 minutes.
- Use lip balm or cream that has an SPF of 30 or higher to protect your lips from getting sunburned.

### Preventing sun exposure in children

Start protecting your child from the sun when your child is a baby. Because children spend a lot of time outdoors playing, they get most of their lifetime sun exposure in their first 18 years.

Keep babies younger than 12 months out of the sun. This is the safest thing to do for young babies. Children 12 months and older can go in the sun, but they should have their skin protected from too much sun exposure. Teach children how to protect their skin from the sun. Use the "ABCs" to do this.

- **A = Away.** Stay away from the sun as much as possible from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Find shade if you need to be outdoors.
- **B = Block.** Use a sunscreen with a SPF of 30 or higher to protect babies' and children's very sensitive skin.
- **C = Cover up.** Have your child wear clothing that covers the skin, hats with wide brims, and sunglasses with UV protection. Even one-year-old children should wear sunglasses with UV protection.

## Wellness Articles

Alberta Health Services encourages all Albertans to live a healthy life. These weekly Wellness Articles are created by a team of healthcare professionals from AHS in collaboration with provincial healthcare experts in Alberta and content from [myhealth.alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca). Our experts ensure this information is factual, current, and written for Albertans.

From stress-relief strategies to finding balance within your life, these Wellness Articles cover a variety of different topics designed to inspire and educate Albertans on creating a positive and healthy lifestyle.

We welcome and encourage weekly newspapers, community newsletters and other publications to reproduce this information free of charge. Please credit Alberta Health Services or the identified content provider.

If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: [rebecca.johnson2@ahs.ca](mailto:rebecca.johnson2@ahs.ca). You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.