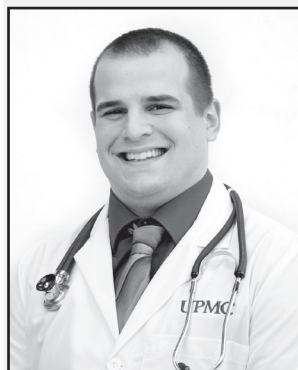


Health Beat

HEALTH, MIND & BODY

Six Tips for Sun Safety for Kids



By: Michael Pearl, PA-C
Family Medicine, UPMC in the
Susquehanna Region

Over the last few months our families have spent a lot of time at home and indoors, and we are ready to spend quality time outside. Before we send our kids out to play and enjoy summer, we need to be careful to protect their skin from the harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays.

The Skin Cancer Foundation estimates that 80% of lifetime sun exposure occurs during childhood. Whether in the pool, park, or just playing in the back yard, children need protection from the sun. Here are six of our top sun safety tips for kids:

1. Don't purposely tan. Wanting dark, bronzed skin often starts in the teen years, and the habit often continues into adulthood. It is important to teach your young children that there are dangers to tanning your skin. UV exposure adds up over time and increases your risk for skin cancer and life-threatening melanoma.
2. Wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30. Most sunscreen for children has SPF 50 but read the label carefully for broad-spectrum coverage. The cream form is typically better than lotion or spray. Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside and reapply every two hours, especially after sweating, swimming, or toweling off. Don't miss ears, hands, feet, shoulders, and behind the neck. A lip balm with SPF protection can prevent lips from getting sunburned as well. It is also a good idea to test a small amount of the sunscreen on your child's skin before covering them completely to make sure they don't have an allergic reaction, especially if they are under six months of age.
3. Cover skin from the sun. Hats, long sleeves, and pants made of a lightweight, protective material are best to help reduce exposure to the damaging rays of the sun. When your child is in shorts or not wearing a shirt, such as when they're swimming, make sure they take shade break to give their body a break and cover their arms and legs with clothing or towels.
4. Find shade. The sun is strongest and most harmful from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. which is also prime time for summer playtime. Plan indoor activities during those hours when possible and encourage your children to head outdoors after dinner to take advantage of the late sunsets. Remember, clouds do not block UV rays, they just filter it slightly, so treat cloudy days just like sunny days. When outdoors, encourage your children to play in the shade of trees and bring a shade umbrella or tent along for young children.
5. Protect their eyes. The sun's rays can be harmful to the eyes. Consider a hat that offers shade to the face and eyes as well as sunglasses. It can be tricky to find the proper sunglasses for children that aren't just for decorative effect so look for UV labeling. The UV absorption should be 400 nanometers or higher or block at least 99% of UV rays. Polarized doesn't mean it protects you from the UV rays, it just describes how the light looks in the lens of sunglasses. Wrap-around or oversized sunglasses may offer added protection as well.
6. Wear a wide-brimmed hat. Throw away the cute visor or the baseball cap when trying to protect your child from the sun. The hat should be wide-brimmed and shade the face, scalp, neck and ears.

Most importantly, set a good example for your kids. Follow the tips above and let your child see that you are following the same sun-safety rules you ask them to follow. Don't leave home

without the essentials for sun protection and consider keeping spares ready to go—in your car, bag, or your child's backpack – so that you're never without.

Michael Pearl is a physician assistant with UPMC's Family Medicine at Lock Haven, 610 High St., Lock Haven. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call 570-748-1250.

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