

Protecting Your Child from the Sun and Heat



Highlights

Make sure your child drinks extra fluids on hot days to prevent dehydration.

Keep your child in a cool environment on hot days to avoid heatstroke.

You can protect your child from the sun by 'slipping' on appropriate clothing, 'slopping' on sunscreen (for babies over 6 months old), 'slapping' on a hat, 'seeking' shade, and 'sliding' on sunglasses.

See a doctor immediately if your baby shows signs of severe dehydration or heatstroke.

In This Article

Why is sun protection important for my child?

What is the UV Index?

How can I protect my baby from the sun?

Is it safe to apply sunscreen to my baby's skin?

Why do I need to protect my baby's eyes from the sun?

How should I dress my baby for the outdoors?

How can I treat my baby's sunburn?

How do I know if my baby is dehydrated?

What is heat rash?

What is heatstroke?

Why is sun protection important for my child?

Babies and children have sensitive skin that can burn easily. Being exposed to too much ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun can lead to:

- Sunburn
- Eye damage
- Skin cancer in later life

Your child needs protection from the sun from the day they are born.

Remember, your child doesn't need to be directly in the sun to be burned by UV radiation. UV rays can still reach them on cool or overcast days.

Even while in the shade, UV radiation can reflect off:

- Water
- Sand
- Snow

Your baby can also be exposed to UV radiation:

- While you are walking with them in the pram
- Through car windows while you're driving
- If their clothing isn't sitting on them properly

What is the UV Index?

The UV Index tells you how intense the UV radiation is at any time during the day. A UV index of 3 or above means the radiation level is high enough to damage your skin.

Babies under 12 months old should be kept away from direct sunlight when UV levels reach 3 or above.

How can I protect my baby from the sun?

Babies and children need sun protection whenever UV Index levels reach 3 or above.

In general, you should:

Slip on clothing to protect your child's skin.

Slop on sunscreen.

Slap on a hat.

Seek shade - you can create shade from the pram, play area, or window covers.

Slide on some sunglasses.

Using a combination of these methods will help avoid excessive exposure to dangerous UV radiation.

Is it safe to apply sunscreen to my baby's skin?

Babies have very sensitive skin that can react to sunscreen. Using sunscreen is not recommended if your baby is under 6 months old. For older babies, test the sunscreen on a small patch of skin inside the forearm for a few days to check for any reaction.

When choosing sun protection, select a sunscreen that is:

Broad-spectrum

Water-resistant

At least SPF 30+

Apply sunscreen 15 to 20 minutes before going outside and reapply every 2 hours.

Sunscreen should be used as the last line of defense after:

Avoiding direct sunlight

Putting on protective clothing, a hat, and shade

Why do I need to protect my baby's eyes from the sun?

UV radiation can damage your child's eyes. If your baby's eyes get sunburnt,

they will be red and sore. Repeated exposure to the sun can lead to serious, long-term eye problems including:

Cataracts

Damage to the retina or cornea

Cancer

Using sun protection will help protect your baby's eyes from UV radiation.

How should I dress my baby for the outdoors?

To protect your child's skin from the sun, choose clothes that:

Cover as much of your baby's skin as possible, such as long sleeves and pants

Are loose-fitting

Are made from densely woven fabric

Preferably have an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) rating of 50

Also, choose a broad-brimmed bucket or legionnaire-style hat to protect your baby's face, neck, and ears.

How can I treat my baby's sunburn?

Your child may have sunburn if their skin is:

Red

Warm

Swollen

Painful

If the sunburn is minor:

Keep your child in a cool and shady place

Give them paracetamol or ibuprofen if they have pain or swelling

Bathe the area with cool or lukewarm water or apply a cool cloth to the sunburnt area

See a doctor if your child has severe sunburn, blisters, signs of infection, or

symptoms like headaches, nausea, vomiting, or dizziness.

How do I know if my baby is dehydrated?

Signs of dehydration include:

Dizziness or light-headedness

Headaches

Nausea

Dark yellow or brown urine

Fewer wet nappies

Dry lips and mouth

Severe dehydration is dangerous. Seek medical attention if your baby:

Is extremely thirsty

Is drowsy, tired, or lethargic

Has cold hands and feet

Has a fast breathing rate and heart rate

Is irritable or confused

Has a sunken fontanelle (soft spot on the head)

What is heat rash?

Heat rash looks like little red spots or blisters on the skin. It is common in babies because their sweat glands aren't fully developed.

To help prevent heat rash:

Dress your child in loose, light clothing

Keep them in a well-ventilated environment

See a doctor if the rash does not go away, gets infected, or if your baby has a high fever.

What is heatstroke?

Heatstroke is a medical emergency. Symptoms include:

High body temperature \(\text{over } 40^\circ\text{C}\)

Red, hot, and dry skin

Nausea

Rapid pulse and breathing

Lethargy or confusion

Unconsciousness

If you think your child has heatstroke, move them to a cool area, remove unnecessary clothing, and cool them down with damp cloths or a sponge. Try to give them small drinks of water if they are awake and responding.

Tools and Assistance

For additional information on sun protection, sunscreen use, and staying safe in the sun, you can refer to the following resources:

Your doctor or pediatrician: For advice on sun protection, choosing the right sunscreen for your child's skin, and addressing any health concerns.

Specialized sun safety organizations: Organizations that provide information on sun safety, including guidelines on sunscreen use, UV-protective clothing, and preventing heatstroke.

UV index tracking apps: There are apps available that provide real-time UV index information for your location, helping you determine the necessary level of sun protection for your child.

Sun protection products for babies and children: Look for sunscreens, UV-protective clothing, hats, and sunglasses specifically designed for children. Many brands offer products suitable for sensitive skin.

Local health authorities: If you have any questions about protecting children from the sun or need additional guidance, consult with local health authorities or healthcare professionals.