

Be Sun Safe

Is there anything better than a gorgeous sunny day? With the beautiful summer that we have been experiencing so far, most of us are spending a lot of time outside doing the things we love to do such as swimming, bicycling, and enjoying activities at the beach and playground. Fun in the sun has many benefits such as helping our body to produce vitamin D which is necessary for building strong and healthy bones. It also helps improve people's moods and generally a sunny day makes many of us feel better. However, like all good things, we should be aware of the risks associated with too much exposure to the sun as well.

The sun gives off several types of ultraviolet (UV) rays, two of which are called UVA and UVB rays. UVA, the most common rays, pass through the ozone layer, causing early aging of the skin, wrinkling, and possibly skin cancer. UVB rays, although mostly filtered by the ozone layer, can still pass through causing sunburns, cataracts and skin cancer. Children require the most protection. They are particularly at risk, as sun exposure during childhood and adolescence appears to increase the risk for health consequences later in life particularly for melanoma the most dangerous form of skin cancer (Canadian Dermatology Association).

Health Canada states that, on average, one in seven Canadians will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. This is why it is very important to be smart with sun safety. Get out, get active and enjoy the beautiful weather but be sun smart! Keep in mind how to protect you and your family from sun exposure to its hazardous rays:

- Whenever possible, limit the time spent exposed to the sun between the hours of 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. as these are the times when the sun's rays are the strongest and most harmful.
- Always wear a wide brimmed hat that shades the sensitive areas of your face, head and neck.
- Stay in the shade as much as possible. Bring an umbrella to the beach or find shade under a nearby tree.
- Use sunscreen that is CDA approved and make sure it is broad spectrum, meaning that it contains protection against both UVA and UVB rays.
- Remember to apply sunscreen approximately 30 minutes before going outside and reapply again after 20 minutes once exposed to the sun. Sunscreen applications should then be repeated every two hours unless having been in the water or sweating a lot.
- Use enough sunscreen to all sun-exposed areas so that it forms a film when you apply it initially.
- Swimmers should use water proof or water resistant sunscreen but still reapply immediately after getting out of the water.
- Always use SPF (Sun Protection Factor) of 30 or higher on children older than 6 months. It is not recommended to use sunscreen on infants under the age of 6 months, and as a result, they should never be exposed to direct sunlight.
- Don't forget to use SPF in lip balm as lips are also very sensitive to the sun's rays.
- Don't use sunscreen beyond the expiratory date as indicated on the container. The ingredients breakdown and do not provide the protective effects required against the sun's rays.

- It is equally important to protect against UV rays all year round; not just during the summer.
- Model sun-protective behaviour yourself - children learn best by example.
- Certain medications can make your skin more sensitive to UV rays. Consult your doctor if you have any questions about your medication.
- UV rays can be reflected off snow, water, sand and concrete. You need to protect yourself on cloudy days, when you're swimming, and even while skiing.
- Tanning equipment like tanning beds will damage your skin and should be avoided. Sunless tanning products such as bronzers offer an alternative to tanning and come in various forms (sprays, lotions, towelettes). It is important to note that, although these products may give skin a golden color, they do not offer ultraviolet protection. You still need to practice sun safety when using these products.

Be sun prepared! If you leave your sunscreen and hat by the door, it will serve as a reminder to put both on before enjoying your day outside! Most importantly, be a role model. Children learn by example. Remember to slip, slop and slap! Slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen and slap on a hat! Your safest alternative to tanning is to just accept the colour of your skin as it is.

For more information, please contact your local Public Health Nurse or visit the Health Canada website at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca;
Canadian Dermatology Association at: www.dermatology.ca;
Canadian Cancer Society locally at 634-6542 or visit: www.cancer.ca.

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