



Rocky Mtn Region

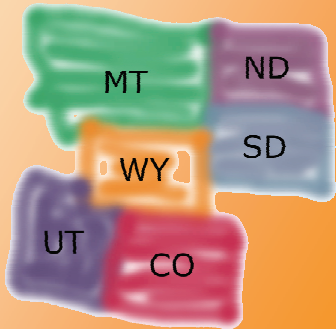
Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit

A Network of Experts in Children's Environmental Health

Denver Health & Hospital/ Rocky Mountain Poison & Drug Center/ National Jewish Medical & Research Center, Denver, CO

Sun Exposure & Children

The Rocky Mountain Region Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit serves Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming.



The Sun Can Be Harmful...

Children have thinner, more sensitive skin that is easily damaged by the harmful ultraviolet (UV) light of the sun. Children also have more skin (body surface area) for their body size (mass) compared to adults.

Why is the Sun So Harmful?

The Ultraviolet light from the sun penetrates deeply into the skin, causing damage. In response to this damage, the skin may "tan" in some children. Other children may get simple sunburn repeatedly.

The Myth of a Healthy Tan...

Tanning of the skin is proof of skin damage. Upon exposure to the harmful ultraviolet light of the sun, the skin protects itself by making *melanin*, a pigment that helps protect the skin. While some individuals may feel healthy with a tan or enjoy tanning, no evidence exists that supports tanning as a healthy practice. Simple sunburn repeatedly.

How to Choose and Use Sunscreen

- ◆ Use a product with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or greater.
- ◆ Remember to apply the sunscreen as part of a daily routine before going out into the sun.
- ◆ Use sunscreen at all times of the year.
- ◆ Apply the sunscreen thoroughly 30 minutes before going out into the sun so the lotion has time to penetrate the skin.
- ◆ Use a lot of the lotion (at least one ounce) each time the lotion is applied.
- ◆ Reapply the sunscreen after swimming or a lot of exercise.
- ◆ Generously apply sunscreen to heavily sun-exposed areas of the body including face, ears, neck, arms and shoulders.
- ◆ Apply sunscreen to areas that are covered by clothes as well.
- ◆ Young children should be kept out of the sun as much as possible but sunscreen can be used on young children as well.

What are Harmful Effects of Sun Exposure for Children?

Skin cancer is the most worrisome result of sun exposure and skin damage. The more superficial *basal cell* and *squamous cell* skin cancers are very curable and are the most common types of skin cancer. About 1 in 3 individuals will develop these types of cancer at some point. However, the increasingly common *melanoma* skin cancer can be fatal, and about 1 in 70 individuals will develop melanoma. Most cases of melanoma arise from a mole. Mole formation is another result of sun exposure and damage. It is preventable by limiting sun exposure in early childhood through adolescence.

Skin damage is cumulative—the skin remembers damage that has occurred in the past. This means that repeated blistering sunburns in childhood directly influence the risk of cancer as an adult.

Most skin cancers develop on sun exposed areas of the body. Simple measures such as sun avoidance, regular use of sunscreens and use of protective hats and clothing will help limit sun damage.

What Can You Do to Protect Your Children?

- ◆ Prevent exposure to the sun as much as possible.
- ◆ Keep your children indoors or in the shade as much as possible during the peak sunlight hours between 10am and 4pm.
- ◆ Use sunscreen daily.
- ◆ Provide a good health model by using sunscreen yourself.
- ◆ Wear UV protective sunglasses. Check the label on the sunglasses...it will tell you the degree of protection from both UV A and UV B sunlight.
- ◆ Wear a hat and long-sleeve clothing while out in the sun.
- ◆ Ask about the sun care protection used by your daycare or babysitter.
- ◆ Beware of cloudy days when the ultraviolet light exposure is just as strong.
- ◆ Discourage your children and teenagers from “tanning” both indoors and outdoors.
- ◆ Check the daily “UV Index” available at the EPA website below and published in many daily newspapers.
- ◆ Help your children develop life-long habits that will protect against developing skin cancer.

Need More Information on Sun Exposure and Children?

Contact your child's primary care provider

The American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org

The American Academy of Dermatology www.aad.org

The Sunwise Program from the Environmental Protection Agency www.epa.gov/sunwise

CALL ANYTIME FREE!
1-877-800-5554

Rocky Mountain Pediatric Environmental Health Line

