



Sun protection for babies and toddlers

A baby's skin is thin, extremely sensitive and can burn easily.¹ The more sun exposure during childhood, the greater the risk of skin cancer in later life.

Cancer Council Victoria recommends that babies under 12 months are not exposed to direct sun during sun protection times.

The sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the main cause of skin cancer.

Sun protection is recommended whenever the UV level reaches 3 or above.

Download the free SunSmart app or visit sunsmart.com.au to check what times you need to use sun protection each day.

During the sun protection times, protect yourself in five ways:

1. Slip on clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
2. Slop on SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen 20 minutes before you go outdoors and re-apply every two hours.
3. Slap on a broad-brimmed hat that shades your face, head, neck and ears.
4. Seek shade.
5. Slide on sunglasses that meet the Australian Standard for UV protection.

1. Slip on sun-protective clothing

Cover as much of the baby's skin as possible with cool, loose-fitting clothes and wraps. The higher the UV protection factor (UPF), the greater the protection the fabric will provide. If possible, choose fabrics that are at least UPF15 (good protection), but preferably UPF50 and UPF50+ (excellent protection).

Some fabrics may have their rating improved by being specially treated.

UPF classifications AS 4399:2020		
UPF rating	UPF classification	% UV radiation blocked
15	Minimum protection	93.3%
30	Good protection	96.7%
50, 50+	Excellent protection	98%

If you choose clothing that doesn't have a UPF label, look for fabrics that contain full percentages and/or blends of natural fibres like cotton, linen and hemp, or synthetics such as polyester, nylon, lycra and polypropylene.

The tighter the fabric structure, whether knitted or woven, the better the sun protection.

2. Slop on SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen

The widespread use of sunscreen on babies under 6 months old is not recommended. Physical protection such as shade, clothing and broad-brimmed hats are the best sun protection measures. If babies are kept out of the sun or well protected from UV radiation by clothing, hats and shade, then sunscreen only needs to be used occasionally on very small areas.

In these cases, choose a sunscreen that is suitable for babies such as a sensitive or toddler sunscreen. These are just as protective, but much gentler on their skin.

Sensitive and toddler sunscreens avoid using ingredients and preservatives that may cause reactions in young skin.

It is recommended you apply a small amount of the product on a small area of the child's skin for a few days to check if the skin reacts before

applying it to other areas not protected by clothing.

While the usage test may show whether the skin is sensitive to an ingredient in the sunscreen, it may not always indicate an allergy. An allergy may occur after repeated use of the product. As with all products, use of any sunscreen should cease immediately and medical attention sought if any unusual reaction is observed. Professional assessment and testing by a dermatologist may be useful in identifying the ingredient in the sunscreen that is causing the reaction.

You could also ask your maternal and child health nurse, pharmacist or doctor for advice.

Sunscreen tips

- Use an SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sensitive or toddler formula sunscreen.
- Store sunscreen under 30°C and only use sunscreen within the expiry date.
- If possible, try to apply sunscreen about 20 minutes before your child goes outside to give sunscreen time to bind to the skin.
- Reapply every two hours (even if the packaging says otherwise).
- Sunscreen should never be used as the only sun protection measure or to extend time in the sun.
- Role model applying sunscreen so children can see it is something everyone in the family does.
- To create some fun, apply dots and squiggles of sunscreen to spread on the skin.

3. Slap on a broad-brimmed hat

A sun-protective hat provides good shade to the face, back of the neck, eyes and ears. Wearing a hat with a broad brim that shades the eyes can reduce UV radiation to the eyes by 50%.³

Suitable sun protection hats include:

- legionnaire hats with a flap at the back to protect the neck – the flap and front peak should overlap at the sides
- bucket hats with a deep crown and angled brim (at least 5cm brim for young children) that sit easily on the child's head
- broad-brimmed hats (at least 5cm brim for young children).

Caps and visors do not protect the ears, cheeks and neck so are not considered suitable for sun protection.

When choosing a hat for young children, consider:

- the size and comfort
- the amount of shade it provides
- if it will obstruct vision or hearing
- safety.

Hats that can be adjusted at the crown are best. If the hat is secured with a long strap and toggle, ensure it has a safety snap. Place the strap at the back of the head or trim the length so it doesn't become a choking hazard.

Many children do not like to wear hats. Persistence is needed to teach them that a hat is part of their outside routine. It is also helpful if adults role model sun protective behaviours.

For babies, choose a fabric and design such as a soft bucket hat that will crumple easily when they put their head down.

4. Seek shade

If outdoors, babies and young children need to be kept in the shade. Because UV radiation can be reflected off surfaces such as sand and concrete, and scattered by particles in the air, some UV can still reach skin even when in the shade, so you will still need to use a hat, clothing and, if applicable, sunscreen and sunglasses when in the shade.

The shade moves with the sun, so follow the shade. When travelling, use a shade visor or hang a blanket over the side windows in the car.

When buying a pram, check that the hood can be adjusted so that it can be moved to block out the direct sun, or consider an umbrella attachment. Some mesh covers that fit over the pram not only provide protection from direct and indirect UV but also allow visibility and good air flow. Look for a mesh cover that is at least UPF 3.3 (blocks around 70% of UV). Monitor airflow to make sure baby keeps cool. Always check the UV protection and air permeability properties of a pram attachment.

5. Slide on sunglasses

If it's practical, protect eyes with sunglasses. Look for a pair that:

- are a close-fitting, wrap-around style that covers as much of the eye area as possible
- meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067 (category 2, 3 or 4)^{4,5}
- are preferably eye protection factor (EPF) 9 or 10⁶
- have soft elastic to keep them in place.

Toy sunglasses do not meet the Australian Standard and should not be used for sun protection.

Remember that even without wearing sunglasses, wearing a hat with a brim can reduce UV radiation to the eyes by 50%.³

[Optometry Australia](#) recommends using eye protection all year round.

Role modelling

Children copy those around them and learn by imitation. If adults adopt sun protection behaviours, the children in their care are more likely to do the same.⁷

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is a hormone that controls calcium levels in the blood. It is needed for healthy bones, muscles and teeth and is important for general health.^{8,9} Most vitamin D is made in the skin from exposure to the sun's UV. Babies get their initial store of vitamin D from their mothers, so they are at risk of low vitamin D if their mother has low levels.¹⁰ If you are concerned about your child's vitamin D levels, see your doctor.

Jaundice and nappy rash

Exposing babies to direct sun is not recommended to treat jaundice or nappy rash. Exposing a baby to direct sun can put them at high risk of UV damage. Jaundice causes concern in about 10% of babies.¹¹ Jaundice should be treated under medical supervision in a controlled environment.

For skin affected by nappy rash, recommendations include frequent nappy changing, applying barrier creams to the

affected areas and exposing the inflamed area to the open air as much as possible but not to the direct sun.

More information and resources

For more information, visit sunsmart.com.au or contact Cancer Council on 13 11 20.

For more information about how to protect your child's skin, visit sunsmart.com.au/protect-your-skin

Certain health conditions and medications mean some people are more sensitive to UV radiation and always need to use sun protection regardless of the UV levels. For more information, visit sunsmart.com.au/skin-cancer/risk-factors-for-skin-cancer.

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