

Sun Safety: Be Aware of the Sun & the Potential for Sunburn

Children can become easily sunburned during outdoor playtime. Simple actions like wearing hats and applying sunscreen on uncovered skin, playing in shaded areas or playing indoors during mid-day, all help to protect a child's developing skin and reduce the risk of skin cancer. The majority of a person's lifetime exposure to the sun occurs by age 18. Too much sun causes skin cancer, including potentially fatal skin cancers like melanoma. Arizona is second in the world for skin cancer rates. Childcare centers are a great place to start sun safety habits that can last long into adulthood. How can you protect yourself and the children in your care?

All children should be protected from the sun and potential sunburn when outdoors.

- Infants younger than 6 months should be kept out of direct sunlight to protect their sensitive skin. Children under 12 months should have limited sun exposure.
- For a newborn, use a carriage with a hood that can be adjusted to block the sun.
- With a toddler, use a canopy stroller or umbrella attachment to shade the child.
- Seek shade from an awning, tree or umbrella, especially when the sun is most intense. Peak sun exposure occurs from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.
- Protect baby's head and face with a wide-brimmed hat. Cover exposed arms and legs with clothing, or a lightweight cloth. Soft-foam sunglasses can protect eyes.
- Minimal sunscreen may be applied to an infant's face and back of the hands after checking with parents who've consulted their pediatrician. Choose a moisturizing (not alcohol-based) water-resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Test an area on the child's arm 1st for possible reaction. Avoid eyes.
- Children 3 and older can be taught to self-apply sunscreen. Children can practice by applying imaginary sunscreen onto exposed skin starting with their face. Use fun imagery. For example, rub sunscreen on your neck like a giraffe, on your toes like a turtle. Avoid eye area and inner ear. Once proficient, use real sunscreen.
- Older children like a discovery approach to sun safety. The sun is a glowing ball of plasma 93 million miles away, but its invisible ultraviolet (UV) rays can burn and damage skin. UV-A rays age skin like an alligator's. UV-B rays burn skin. Both rays penetrate skin and can cause cell changes that lead to skin cancer, unless we protect skin with sunscreen, clothing, hats, sunglasses and lip balm.
- Providers can ask parents to apply sunscreen to children before arriving at the site.
- Sunscreen lasts only about 2 ½ hours. Sunscreen applied in the morning should be reapplied at lunch or sooner if engaging in water play or after activities where children sweat and sunscreen can wear off. "Waterproof" sunscreens wear off.
- Some centers have gallon jugs of sunscreen so all children have access and so that children can self-apply. Sunscreen should be an SPF 15 or higher.
- A wide-brimmed hat (2 inches or wider) provides more protection than a baseball hat or visor which does not protect the ears, back of the neck or scalp.

As childcare providers, set a good example. Protect your skin and remind the children in your care to do the same. Have your center write a simple 1-page sun safety policy. Display it and share with parents, staff and students. You may download the sun safety policy template, tip sheet, and learn more about the annual SunWise poster contest for children at www.azdhs.gov/phs/sunwise.