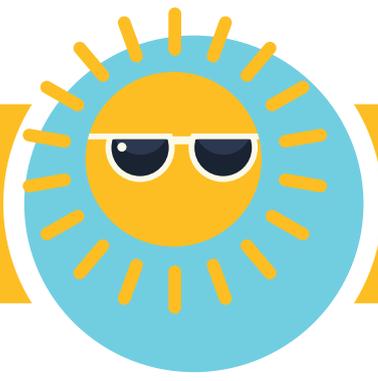


# Protecting Children's Skin from the Sun: Your Questions Answered

Be SunSmart



# SunSmart

## Why is it important to protect children's skin from the sun?

Ultraviolet radiation (UV) is a part of sunlight. It can damage the skin and increase risk of skin cancer. Children are particularly vulnerable to UV exposure. Severe sunburn during childhood (>3 instances before the age of 20) is associated with a 2-4 times higher risk of developing melanoma in later life.

In Ireland, the intensity of the UV radiation from the sun is greatest from April – September, particularly between 11am and 3pm, even when it is cloudy.

Encourage sun protection for children by slipping on clothing that covers skin, for example a wide brimmed hat, top with long sleeves, seeking shade to play under and using a sunshade on a buggy.

For more information on how to protect children's skin click on the link below:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/prevention/sunsmart.html>

## What advice can I give to parents and carers to protect children's skin from the sun?

The Healthy Ireland SunSmart simple 5S's shows how to protect children's skin from the sun.

- **Slip** on clothing: Cover skin as much as possible e.g. wear long sleeves, collared t-shirts, clothes made from close-woven material that does not allow sunlight through.
- **Slop** on broad-spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30+ for adults and 50+ for children, with high UVA protection, and water resistant. Reapply regularly.
- **Slap** on a hat with a wide brim: Protect face, ears and neck.
- **Seek shade:** e.g. Sit in cover of trees to avoid direct sunlight and use a sunshade on a buggy or pram. Keep babies and children out of direct sunlight.
- **Slide** on sunglasses with UV protection: Guard eyes from harm.

Remember the SunSmart 5 'Ss', even when it is cloudy:

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**Be SunSmart**





# Clothing

## What type of clothes protect children's skin from the sun?

Encourage parents and carers to protect children's skin from the sun by:

- covering skin as much as possible with comfortable loose-fitting outfits that cover their arms and legs e.g. tops with long sleeves, collared t-shirts, clothes made from close-woven material that does not allow sunlight through.
- put on a wide brimmed hat to protect the face, ears and neck. Soft hats are available for babies that allow freedom of movement and easily crease or crumple if they rest their head.
- wearing child-size UV protective sunglasses
- using a shade on prams and buggy or pushchairs
- plan the day's activities in advance to reduce children's time in the sun, particularly between 11am and 3pm when the sun's UV rays are strongest.

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## When should children wear sunglasses?

Children's eyes can be protected from UV rays with sunglasses. It's important to select sunglasses that give as close to 100% UV-protection as possible. Wraparound sunglasses are best. Choose sunglasses that meet the EN ISO 12312-1 standard and are child-sized.

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# Clothing

## What type of clothes protect children's skin from the sun when outside?

Protect children's skin from the sun by covering skin with clothing and seeking shade when outside.

Encourage parents and carers to dress children in comfortable loose-fitting outfits that cover arms and legs.

Some fabrics give better UV protection from the sun than others:

- The weave and composition of the material is important, use fabric that is tightly woven. Synthetic fabrics often have a tighter weave, but natural fabrics such as cotton can also be tightly woven and are comfortable to wear<sup>2</sup>. Remember if clothing gets wet or stretched, it may lose some of its protective qualities.
- Dark clothes block more UV rays than light-coloured clothes.
- Clothes labelled with a ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) of at least 40 block UV rays from passing through<sup>3</sup>. The UPF indicates how much UV radiation (both UVB and UVA) a fabric allows to reach skin.

Babies and children can also wear a hat with a wide brim or with neck flaps at the back (also known as legionnaire style hats) to protect their faces, necks and ears from the sun.

If swimming, children can wear swimwear that covers their shoulders and back such as rash vests and swimming shorts

For more information on how to protect children's skin click on the link below:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/prevention/sunsmart.html>



# Sunscreen

## How should sunscreen be applied to a child?

Seeking shade and wearing clothes that cover skin should be the main method of sun protection. Sunscreen can be used in addition to these.

A patch test of sunscreen on children's skin can be done first. Physical (inorganic) sunscreens that reflect UV radiation away from the skin (e.g. those containing ingredients zinc oxide or titanium dioxide), or sunscreens specifically made for babies or toddlers may cause less irritation to sensitive skin. Alternatively, you might consider sunscreen brands specifically designed for sensitive skin.

Apply broad-spectrum (protection against UVA/UVB) sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 50+ for children, with high UVA protection, and water resistant. Use on exposed parts of the skin, including the face, ears, neck, nose, lips and tops of the feet. Sunscreen should be applied 20 minutes before going out into the sun. Remember apply carefully so it does not get into children's eyes.

Reapply sunscreen generously and evenly every 2 hours and always after playing outdoors or swimming. This includes 'water-resistant' and 'water-proof' sunscreen.

If a child has any skin conditions seek advice from your doctor with regards to sunscreen.

For children under 12 months, it is best to keep them out of direct sunlight. For example, by providing shade when they are outdoors and wearing protective clothing and hats.

Sunscreens are not usually recommended for babies younger than 6 months. Cover skin with appropriate clothing and a wide brimmed hat.

For more information on how to protect children's skin see the links below

- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/prevention/sunsmart.html>
- <https://irishskin.ie/no-sunscreen-can-provide-100-sun-protection/>
- <https://www.mariekeating.ie/be-sun-smart/>
- <https://www.cancer.ie/cancer-information-and-support/cancer-types/skin-cancer/sunsmart-code>
- <https://www.breakthroughcancerresearch.ie/skin-cancer-in-ireland/>



# Sunscreen

## What type of sunscreen should be used on children?

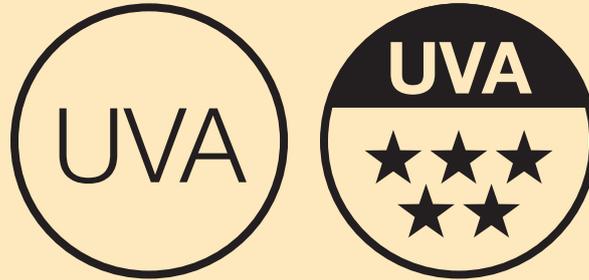
Advise parents and carers to use sunscreen or sun cream that:

- has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 50 or higher
- protects against both types of rays that can damage skin (UVA and UVB)
- is suitable for child's age and skin.

The SPF is how much protection there is against UVB. Look for one with an SPF 50+ and one of the symbols below on the bottle to check it also protects against UVA.

The EU recommends that the UVA protection offered in a sunscreen should be at least one third of the SPF. Sunscreen products meeting this requirement are eligible to display a UVA logo, with the letters UVA enclosed within a circle.

UVA Star ratings on sunscreen range from 0-5, and indicate the level of protection the sunscreen provides against UVA, compared with the level of protection it provides against UVB. The higher the number of stars, the greater the level of protection against UVA.



Sunscreens with a low SPF can still have a high number of stars, not because they are offering high UVA protection, but because the ratio between UVA and UVB protection is the same as offered in sunscreens with higher SPF. This is why it is very important to choose a sunscreen with a high SPF as well as high UVA protection (ideally 4 or 5 stars).

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# Shade

## Why and when should parents and carers seek shade from the sun for children?

Playing and spending time outdoors is such an important part of childhood but it is crucial that children are protected and safe in the sun. Parents and carers are advised to Be SunSmart especially when the sun's UV rays are strongest, typically between 11am to 3pm from April to September. Seeking shade protects babies and children's skin as it lessens the amount of intense sunshine reaching skin. Sit in the cover of trees to avoid direct sunlight and use a sunshade on your buggy or pram.

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## How can parents and carers seek shade from the sun for children?

Children should play in the cover of shade, if possible, especially between 11am and 3pm from April to September, when the sun's UV rays are at their strongest. Always encourage parents/carers to use a sunshade on a buggy or pram.

Shade can be provided in a range of ways, for examples under trees, shadows cast from nearby buildings, umbrellas, marquees. Always use other sun protective behaviours, such as clothing that covers skin and sunscreen, along with shade as UV rays from the sun can reflect off surfaces such as concrete or sand.

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<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/prevention/sunsmart.html>

## Will children get enough Vitamin D if in the shade?

It is very important to make sure children get enough vitamin D.

The HSE<sup>®</sup> advises all children under 5 years of age are to take vitamin D supplements during winter from Halloween (October 31st) to St Patrick's Day (March 17th).

Babies under 12 months need vitamin D supplements every day if they are:

- breastfed
- have less than 300mls or 10 fluid oz (ounces) of infant formula a day

Read about vitamin D supplements for children aged 1 to 4 years by clicking [here](#)

Read about vitamin D supplements for babies 0 to 12 months by clicking [here](#).

# References

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