

Sun Protection (children)

Babies and children are particularly prone to sunburn, so they should be kept out of the sun. Sunburn in childhood may also make some types of skin cancer more likely later in life.

What causes sunburn?

Sunburn is caused by ultraviolet radiation burning the skin. There are two main types: ultraviolet B (UVB) rays are mainly responsible for burning and tanning; ultraviolet A (UVA) rays contribute long-term damage, such as ageing and wrinkles.

Sun protection products can protect your child from both UVB and UVA. The Sun Protection Factor (SPF) is a measure of how much protection it gives against burning, most of which comes from UVB exposure. The level of protection against UVA rays is shown by the star-rating. Babies and children should use products with SPF 25 to 30 and at least four stars and preferably five stars, but remember they can still burn if they are out in the middle of the day, or they stay out in the sun for too long. Remember to reapply creams frequently and to use a very water resistant product if playing in the water.

How can sunburn be treated?

Avoiding sunburn is best. However, if your child develops a mild sunburn, put them in a cool shower or bath to cool the skin. Apply a soothing after-sun cream or moisturiser. If your child has a fever, make the room as cool as possible, give paracetamol or ibuprofen suspension and give them cool drinks. If sunburn is severe or a fever does not settle, quickly seek medical assistance.

What else can I do to prevent sunburn?

Use a sun umbrella over the pram or pushchair on sunny days. Children should wear T-shirts and hats when playing outside in summer, even when swimming. Don't forget sunglasses for eye protection. These should be checked to ensure they comply with the latest standards for UV-light protection.

When should my child see a doctor?

Seek medical advice if your child's fever does not settle quickly with paracetamol or ibuprofen, or the fever is very high. If the burnt areas blister, see your doctor or nurse as these may need to be dressed. Children's moles may change without there being any serious underlying problem. However, you should always see your doctor if a mole gets bigger, becomes irregular, itches, bleeds or changes in any other way.