

# Doc Talk

By Dr. Veronica Naudin



## Sunscreen Protection for Infants

**Q: I am going to Hawaii with my four-month old infant. Can I use sunscreen on him?**

**A:** Hawaii is a fun place to take an infant. I hope you have a wonderful trip. You are wise to enquire about sunscreen for your baby. This is a question I get asked all the time. In addition to sunscreen, here are some other tips that will help prevent your child from getting sunburned or overheated on a hot day.

*Sunscreens* should be used on all babies and toddlers. I like Coppertone Waterbabies for infants but other products are also efficacious. It is important to test your child's sensitivity to this product. I recommend that you rub a small amount on your child's leg to see if any redness or other reaction occurs before you use sunscreen on your child's skin in the sun. It is also a good idea to make sure your child's scalp and ears are well covered. Small babies do not have much hair to help protect them from the sun. The labels on sunscreen bottles will usually state that sunscreen should not be used on babies younger than six months. However, this labeling is used only because the Food and Drug Administration has never reviewed testing on babies younger than 6 months. The American Academy of Pediatrics recently issued a policy statement recommending sunscreen to babies younger than 6 months.

Parents should choose a sunscreen that protects against ultraviolet A and B rays, has a minimum SPF of 15 and is water resistant. You may need to reapply the sunscreen if your child is in water. For best results, you should apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going out in the sun.

*Clothing and swimwear* can be a physical protection against sunburns. All young children should wear a hat when out in the sun. My favorite choice for infants are hats made by flap happy. These hats have special flaps that help protect delicate ears and necks. Cotton clothes can help to prevent the sun from burning an infant's skin. Wearing a T-shirt at the beach is probably a good idea for most children. Currently, some companies make attractive long-sleeved play-sun wear

for young children. In addition, you can now buy bathing suits that also have SPF 25 in the suits. These suits are generally sold in catalogs or specialty shops and look like old fashioned bathing suits or wet suits. I used one of these suits for my son and he loved it. AND it really protected him from the sun.

*Sun Avoidance.* Remember that the sun's strongest rays occur between the hours of 10 am and 3 pm. This is the time that ultraviolet radiation from the sun is most damaging. Please try to keep your children in shady environments during this time. In addition, sun damage can occur while you are driving. Consider putting a sunshade in your car for your child to avoid sun damage from traveling. Finally, when your child is in the stroller, backpack or front carrier, consider using a blanket to help shield your baby from the sun's rays.

*Increasing fluid intake* is a good idea in warm weather. Young babies can drink 1 - 2 ounces of water in warm days. If you are breastfeeding, remember to increase your fluids by drinking more juice and water on hot days. Toddlers should be encouraged to drink water when they are thirsty.

I hope these suggestions help you to have a healthy vacation. Although the fairest children with light eyes and red hair are most likely to sunburn and have sun damage resulting in skin cancer, I recommend that all children wear sunscreen at all times. If you have further questions regarding the application of sunscreen, talk to your pediatrician this summer.

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