

## Sun Safety

There is nothing better than playing outside on a warm, sunny day. Splashing in a pool, playing in the sand, or going for a walk are just a few of the many activities that we can do to enjoy ourselves out doors.

With young children who are very active, it can be hard to protect them from the UV rays. Sunlight provides us with Vitamin D which helps our bodies absorb calcium. The bad news is that unprotected exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays also causes skin damage, eye injury and can lead to skin cancer. Most children receive up to 80% of their lifetime exposure to the sun before they are 18 and this time in the sun can have a long-term detrimental effect.

Children with fair skin are likely to burn more quickly than children who have a darker, more olive like complexion. Even a slight "tan" can cause damage to skin; more so with children, whose skin is much more sensitive. Children who have the greatest risk are those with moles on their skin (or whose parents have a tendency to develop moles), those with very fair skin and hair, and/or a family history of skin cancer.

UV rays are strongest during the summer months, especially between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. This is a good time to avoid exposure if possible. If your children are playing outside during these hours, be sure to apply a sunscreen. Most of our UV exposure comes from day-to-day activities in the yard and playground – not just at the pool or beach! Also, UV rays are dangerous even on cool, cloudy days when we don't feel the heat of the sun.

When your baby is under six months, the best form of protection from the heat of the day and UV rays is keeping your baby in the shade with a light blanket for protection. Your other option would be to go outdoors earlier or later in the day. Children six months or older should wear a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Fair skinned children should wear an SPF of 30 for better protection. A broad spectrum sunscreen or waterproof lotions are more common selections. Be sure to apply sunscreen a half hour before you head outdoors and then again every two hours. Waterproof sunscreens can last for about an hour and a half before they need to be re-applied. Dry your child off, reapply lotion and keep your child out of the sun and water for about 30 minutes.

Some other tips for protecting your child from the hot sun rays is light, loose colored clothing. Cotton is a great choice of fabric because it is cool and protective. Sunglasses with UV protection and hats or caps with wide brims and protection for the ears and neck will also protect the face eyes and ears.

It's never too early to teach your child about sun safety. Summer is a great time to enjoy the out doors, and doing many fun activities with your children.

A great source of information can be found on the internet by typing in “Summer Safety for Kids.”

By Erin Visser, home visitor. For more information on parenting, contact Family Services of Central Alberta, 343-6400 or go to [www.fsca.ca](http://www.fsca.ca)