

# Action Steps for Sun Protection

While some exposure to sunlight can be enjoyable, too much can be dangerous. Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun can result in a painful sunburn. It can also lead to more serious health problems, including skin cancer, premature aging of the skin, cataracts and other eye damage, and immune system suppression. Children are particularly at risk. This fact sheet explains simple steps to protect yourself and your children from overexposure to UV radiation.

## Be SunWise

Most people are not aware that skin cancer, while largely preventable, is the most common form of cancer in the United States. More than one million cases are reported annually. By following some simple steps, you can still enjoy your time in the sun and protect yourself from overexposure. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends these action steps to help you and your family be “SunWise.”



### Do Not Burn

Sunburns significantly increase one's lifetime risk of developing skin cancer, especially for children.



### Avoid Sun Tanning and Tanning Beds

UV light from tanning beds and the sun causes skin cancer and wrinkling.



### Generously Apply Sunscreen

Generously apply sunscreen: about one ounce to cover all exposed skin 20 minutes before going outside. Sunscreen should have a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15 and provide protection from both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. Reapply every two hours, even on cloudy days, and after swimming or sweating.



### Wear Protective Clothing

Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses, when possible.

  
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a program that radiates good ideas



### Seek Shade

Seek shade when possible and remember that the sun's UV rays are strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.



### Use Extra Caution Near Water, Snow and Sand

Water, snow and sand reflect the damaging rays of the sun, which can increase your chance of sunburn.



### Check the UV Index

The UV Index provides important information to help you plan your outdoor activities in ways that prevent sun overexposure. The UV Index forecast is issued daily by the National Weather Service and EPA. Visit [www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html).



### Get Vitamin D Safely

Get Vitamin D safely through a diet that includes vitamin supplements and foods fortified with Vitamin D. Don't seek the sun.

Early detection of skin cancer can save your life. A new or changing mole should be evaluated by a dermatologist.

## Special Considerations for Children

Recent medical research shows that it is important to protect children and young adults from overexposure to UV radiation. For babies under 6 months, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends

(1) avoiding sun exposure, and (2) dressing infants in lightweight long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and brimmed hats. Parents can also apply sunscreen (SPF 15+) to small areas like the face and back of the hands if protective clothing and shade are not available.

### EPA's SunWise Program

In response to the serious public health threat posed by overexposure to UV radiation, EPA is working with schools and communities across the nation through the SunWise Program. SunWise is an environmental and health education program that teaches children how to protect themselves from overexposure to the sun.

## UV Index

Exposure Category	UVI Range
Low	< 2
Moderate	3 to 5
High	6 to 7
Very high	8 to 10
Extreme	11+

The UV Index forecasts the strength of the sun's harmful rays. The higher the number, the greater the chance of sun damage. Visit [www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html).

## For More Information

To learn more about UV radiation, the action steps for sun protection, and the SunWise Program, call EPA's Stratospheric Ozone Information Hotline at 800.296.1996, or visit our Web site at [www.epa.gov/sunwise](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise).