

Sun Protection Guidelines for Child Care and Early Learning Programs

Why is sun protection important?

The sun produces two types of ultraviolet (UV) rays which can harm a person's health:

- UV-A rays, no matter a person's skin tone, enter the deep layers of the skin and can lead to long-term problems, such as skin cancer and wrinkles.
- UV-B rays are the main cause of immediate damage, like sunburn, because they damage the outer layer of skin cells.

What kind of sunscreen should be used on children?

- Choose a sunscreen that says "broad-spectrum" on the label; that means it will screen out both UVB and UVA rays.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 for children. Higher SPF provides more protection from UV-B rays.
- Use sunscreen with a thicker consistency to lower the chance of sunscreen being rubbed into the eyes.
- **Sunscreen should not be used on infants under 6 months.** Instead, keep children younger than 6 months out of direct sunlight. Find shade under a tree, umbrella, or the stroller canopy; or use a sun hat.
- See the Environmental Working Group's Guide to sunscreen for more information: <https://www.ewg.org/sunscreen/>.

When should sunscreen be applied?

- The [UV Index](#) measures the sun's radiation levels at a certain place and time. **Check the UV Index regularly, even on cloudy days.** The EPA recommends using a sunscreen even at a "moderate" UV Exposure Category (3-5). The EPA provides specific [UV Index](#) information by City or Zip Code.
- Apply sunscreen even on cloudy days because 80% of the sun's harmful UV rays can pass through clouds.
- Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside.
- For children older than 6 months, reapply sunscreen every two hours while outdoors.

What are the rules about sunscreen use in child care programs?

- Parents may provide sunscreen for their child or a program may provide its own “bulk” sunscreen. No matter who provides the sunscreen, **early learning providers can apply sunscreen if it is:**
 - a. In its original packaging;
 - b. Labeled with the child’s first and last name;
 - c. Applied according to the directions on the label; AND
 - d. A parent/guardian has provided written annual consent (valid for up to 12 months) for the sunscreen to be given or applied. (If the parent's instructions are different from the package instructions, a medical provider's authorization is required.)
- Sunscreen cannot be accepted or used if it is homemade.
- Sunscreen, like medications, must be kept out of reach of children. **SUNSCREEN IS POISONOUS IF INGESTED.** If there is any concern this has happened, **CALL SEATTLE POISON CONTROL CENTER AT 1-800-222-1222.**

Shade protects against the sun

- WAC 110-300-0145 requires early learning programs to have **shaded areas in outdoor play spaces**, for example: trees, buildings, or shade structures such as awnings, canopies, sun umbrellas, and sunshades.
- Shade helps reduce sunburns and overheating and provides a comfortable area for children to play outdoors.
- Using shade limits exposure to the sun, especially during the peak sun hours of 10 AM to 4 PM when the sun's UV rays are strongest (the UV index is typically higher during this time).

What else can be done to keep children safe in the sun?

- Have children wear a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirt, and pants if they will be in the sun for a long time.
- Beware of reflective surfaces; sand, snow, concrete and water can reflect up to 85% of the sun's damaging rays.
- Teach children about the need for sun protection. Skin damage from sun exposure accumulates over a lifetime. One severe childhood sunburn can double a person’s risk of developing skin cancer.
- Check the sunscreen’s expiration date – some ingredients lose their effectiveness over time, especially in extreme temperatures. If there is no expiration date, replace it after three years.

Reference: Caring for Our Children. <https://nrckids.org/CFOC/Database/3.4.5.1>