THE FIRST STEPS OF SUN PROTECTION: HOW TO KEEP YOUR BABY SAFE
Study shows some parents don’t properly protect children from harmful UV rays

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OVERVIEW
From childproofing to car seats, parents take all sorts of measures to protect their babies. According to new research presented at the American Academy of Dermatology’s 2015 Summer Academy Meeting in New York, however, some parents are not taking the proper steps to protect their infants from the sun’s harmful ultraviolet rays.

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DERMATOLOGY EXPERT
Information provided by board-certified dermatologist Keyvan Nouri, MD, FAAD, chief of dermatology services, Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center/University of Miami Hospital and Clinics, and Louis C. Skinner Jr., MD, Endowed Chair in Dermatology and Richard Helfman Professor of Dermatologic Surgery, University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine.

SUN PROTECTION RECOMMENDATIONS
UV radiation is the most preventable risk factor for all types of skin cancer, including melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. Unprotected UV exposure can cause sunburn, and sun damage in childhood can lead to skin cancer and early skin aging later in life, so it’s important for parents to protect their children from the sun’s harmful rays, Dr. Nouri says.

The Academy recommends keeping infants younger than 6 months out of the sun as much as possible. Keeping babies in the shade is the best way to shield them from the sun; parents also can protect their children by dressing them in long-sleeved shirts, pants, wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses.

Sunscreen use should be avoided if possible in children younger than 6 months. Parents of infants and toddlers 6 months and older may apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 to their children’s exposed skin; sunscreens containing zinc oxide or titanium dioxide are most appropriate for the sensitive skin of infants and toddlers. Even when using sunscreen, parents should continue to keep their children in the shade and dress them in sun-protective clothing.

RESEARCH
In early 2015, Dr. Nouri and researchers at the University of Miami surveyed 95 parents about their sun protection practices. Only 14.6 percent of respondents could correctly identify the Academy’s recommendations for sun safety in infants.

While 83 percent of the parents surveyed said they routinely seek shade for their babies, only 43 percent reported routinely using a hat to shield their children from the sun, and only 40 percent reported routinely dressing their children in long sleeves and pants for sun protection. Twenty-nine percent said they have routinely used sunscreen on children younger than 6 months, even though other methods of sun protection are recommended for this age group.
Additionally, one-third of survey respondents reported that they routinely attempted to allow their infant to "develop tolerance to the sun's rays" by gradually increasing their sun exposure. Three percent of survey respondents reported that their children had received a sunburn during their first six months of life, while 12 percent reported that their children had tanned during that same period. "Some parents may think they're helping their children by exposing them to the sun, but actually, the opposite is true," Dr. Nouri says. "Unprotected sun exposure can damage the skin and lead to skin cancer."

The majority of parents who participated in the survey were Hispanic or African-American, so this research provides particular insight into the sun protection habits of these populations, Dr. Nouri says. People of color may think they don't need sun protection, he says, but that is not the case. "Anyone can get skin cancer, so everyone should take steps to protect themselves and their children from the sun's harmful rays," Dr. Nouri says. "Parents of all skin colors should set a good example by practicing sun protection and instill good habits in their children from an early age."

**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DERMATOLOGY EXPERT ADVICE**

"Sun protection is important at every stage of life, and that includes infancy," Dr. Nouri says. "Although parents should avoid applying sunscreen to babies younger than 6 months if possible, they can shield their children from the sun by keeping them in the shade and dressing them in protective clothing."

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Fleta Bray served as the lead researcher on this study.

**MORE INFORMATION**

[Sunscreen FAQs](#)
[SpotSkinCancer.org](#)

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