



HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

Sunscreen

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Summer is just about here, with its promise of fresh berries, back yard barbecues, bug bites, and burnt shoulders! Too much exposure to the sun can cause skin cancer. Plus, folks who spend a lot of time under the sun have more wrinkles when they age!! It is possible to protect yourself from the sun's side effects while indulging in the warmth and glow of weekends by the water and long evenings in the yard.

Vitamin D is called the "sunshine vitamin" because its production is triggered by the skin's exposure to sunlight. Many Americans have low levels of vitamin D. The American Medical Association recommends that everyone get 10 minutes of direct sun (without sunscreen) several times per week.

Kids can be very sensitive to the sun's effects.

- Keep them covered with hats and loose-fitting clothing that breathes well, have them play in the shade, and make sure they drink plenty of water.
- Infants are most vulnerable to sun and heat and should avoid direct sunlight when possible.
- Most sunscreen manufacturers suggest you avoid the use of sunscreen for children under 6 months old. The American Pediatrics Association says small amounts of sunscreen can be used on an infant as a last resort, when shade is not available.

When you plan to be outside for longer than 10 minutes, choose a safe, effective sunscreen and apply to all uncovered areas 30 minutes before going into the sun. Sunscreen washes off in water and breaks down in the sun, so re-apply after being in the water or sweating or with continued sun exposure every 2 hours. Look for products that advertise "broad spectrum protection" - this means it protects against **both UVB and UVA** rays. The sun protection factor or SPF states how much exposure it will take for exposed skin to burn with the sunscreen applied, but each person's skin is different and the SPF does not factor in medications or situations that may cause skin to be more sensitive.

Look for sunscreens that rely on mineral ingredients to physically block ultraviolet light from reaching your skin, as opposed to chemical sunscreens that depend on chemicals to absorb UV rays. Titanium dioxide and zinc oxide are considered the best protection against sunburn because they block both UVB and UVA rays. It is unclear whether very small (nano-sized) particles of these minerals can enter into the blood stream. To be cautious, choose sunscreens that use micronized ingredients – particles larger than 100 nm, rather than nano-sized particles.

Summer sun is most intense between 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. This is a good time to retreat to the shade, drink plenty of fluids, and wait for the heat to lessen before working or playing in direct sun.

Avoid the use of products that combine sunscreen with bug repellent. You don't usually need them at the same time of the day and the mixture of ingredients can lead to greater amounts of the pesticide soaking into the skin.

Shade, sunscreen, fluids, breathable clothing, and timing can all work in your favor for a safe and healthy summer!

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