



# Sunburn

## Patient and Family Education

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### What is sunburn?

Sunburn is injury to the skin caused by overexposure to the rays of the sun or a tanning bed. Sunburn causes redness and sometimes blistering of the skin. Most symptoms do not start until two to four hours after being in the sun or under a tanning bed. Some medicines may increase the risk of getting a sunburn. The symptoms are worse after 24 hours but gradually improve in 48 hours. Repeated sunburns greatly increase the risk for skin cancer.

### How do I prevent sunburn?

- **Apply sunscreen any time your child is going to be outside for more than 30 minutes—especially between 10a.m. and 3 p.m. in the summertime.**
- Use sunscreen, shirts with loose long sleeves, long pants and a hat with a brim and sunglasses.
- Protect your child's eyes with sunglasses that are ANSI approved with 95-100 percent UVA and UVB blockage.
- Limit times around water, sand and snow since the reflection will increase your child's exposure to the sun.
- Remember: using only a hat or an umbrella will not protect your child from reflected rays.
- Avoid direct sun exposure for infants 6 months old and younger.

### Sunscreens

- Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before exposure to the sun to give it time to soak into the skin.
- Give special attention to nose, ears, cheeks and shoulders.
- Apply zinc oxide cream to high exposure areas (nose, cheeks, shoulders).
- Reapply every three to four hours, as well as right after swimming or drying off.
- "Waterproof" and "water resistant" sunscreen stays on for about 30 minutes in water. Reapply after swimming.
- Choose a sunscreen with an SPF rating of 30 or higher and both **UVA** and **UVB** protection.
- Sunscreen reduces damage from UV radiation, it does not eliminate it.
- Do not use a combination of sunscreen and insect repellent.

### What is the treatment?

Your child's doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child. Some general guidelines to follow include:

- Ibuprofen (Motrin<sup>®</sup>, Advil<sup>®</sup> or other less costly store brand) may be given for pain. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
  - Do not give ibuprofen to babies less than 6 months of age without a doctor's order.
- Use cool compresses or cool baths several times daily for discomfort (showers may be painful).
- Offer extra water to replace the fluid lost into the swelling of sunburned skin and to prevent dehydration and dizziness.

### **In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.**

This is general information and is not specific medical advice for your child. Always consult your child's doctor or other healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about the care or health of your child. A Children's Healthcare of Atlanta pediatric advice nurse is available 24 hours a day at 404-250-KIDS.

## Sunburn, continued

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- Use moisturizing creams if they make your child feel more comfortable.
- Avoid products containing benzocaine and alcohol.
- Use over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream for one to two days, applied to small areas of the body.
- Sometimes an antihistamine medicine such as Benadryl<sup>®</sup> may be advised to help relieve the itching.

### When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor:

- For any child under 1 year of age with a sunburn
- For temperature above 100.3°F
- For signs of dehydration (drying out):
  - No urine in six to eight hours in an infant younger than 1 year old
  - No urine in more than eight hours in a child older than 1 year old
  - No tears when crying
  - Sunken eyes
  - Dry lips and mouth
- For large or multiple areas of blistering
- For signs of infection:
  - Increase in swelling, redness\* and pain
  - Drainage
  - Bad smell from damaged skin
  - Fever

**\*NOTE:** Sunburn redness will increase for the first 24 hours; this is normal. Increasing redness, especially around an area of blistering after 24 hours is not normal.

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