



Mott Poll Report

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Sunny, Cloudy, Hot or Cool: Keeping Kids Safe in the Sun

Being out in the sun is part of the fun of summertime, but too much exposure can be dangerous and damage the skin. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children ages 5-12 about the strategies they use to protect their child's skin from the sun.

Parents report a variety of strategies to protect their child from the sun. Most parents (91%) at least sometimes have their child use sunscreen. Seven in ten parents (71%) have their child wear hats that shade their face and two-thirds (66%) have their child wear long-sleeved clothing.

When deciding whether or not to have their child use sun protection, factors parents consider as *very important* include: how long their child will be outside (74%), what the child is wearing (66%), the child's complexion/skin tone (62%), whether the child will be around water (62%) and how hot it is (57%). Nearly half of parents (46%) take into account whether it is a sunny or cloudy day.

Most parents say it is *very important* to use sunscreen to prevent sunburn (92%) and skin cancer (89%). Half of parents also think it's *very important* to use sunscreen to prevent premature aging/wrinkling (50%).

Parents' decision on how often to re-apply sunscreen varies based on the situation. If their child were playing in the water, 81% of parents would try to re-apply within 2 hours, 50% if not playing water, 25% if it were a cloudy day, and 20% if their child were playing in a shady area.

When it comes to choosing sunscreen, some parents have a minimum Sun Protection Factor (SPF) rating they use for their child. A third of parents (34%) choose a minimum SPF of 30 for their child, and nearly half choose a higher SPF, with 27% using SPF 45 and 20% using SPF 60 or higher. One in ten (11%) say they do not have a specific minimum SPF they use and 3% report they do not use sunscreen for their child.

Factors parents rate as *very important* in deciding which SPF rating to use are whether it provides adequate protection (82%), child's complexion (54%), recommendation from child's health care provider (45%) and what friends or family use (15%).

Protecting kids' skin from the sun

Percent of parents reporting sunscreen is *very important*

Sunscreen is very important to prevent...

Sunburn 92%

Skin cancer 89%

Premature aging 50%

Report Highlights

9 in 10 parents say it is *very important* to use sunscreen to prevent sunburn and skin cancer.

Nearly half of parents choose a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 45 for their child.

1 in 3 parents do not re-apply sunscreen on their child on a cloudy day.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in January-February 2020 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 0-18 years living in their household (n=2,016). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 1,120 parents who had at least one child age 5-12 years. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±1 to 3 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Implications

Summertime brings increased time and opportunities for outdoor activities and greater exposure to the sun. Too much exposure at one time can cause sunburn, and over time can increase the risk of skin cancer and premature wrinkling. However, there are a lot of things parents can do to keep their school-age child protected from too much sun.

The part of the sun's rays that can damage the skin is ultraviolet (UV) radiation. The first line of defense against harmful UV radiation exposure is covering up, and most parents in this Mott Poll at least sometimes have their child wear a hat and long sleeved clothing. For all children, a wide-brimmed hat that can shade the face and back of the neck, and lightweight clothing that covers the arms and legs can help prevent sunburn. Sunglasses with UV protection are also a good idea for protecting children's eyes.

When it comes to sunscreen, almost all parents in this Mott Poll use it to prevent sunburn, skin cancer and premature wrinkling. However, parents are faced with a lot of sunscreen options and the choices can seem overwhelming. There are two types of UV radiation from the sun that can damage a child's skin, ultraviolet B (UVB) and ultraviolet A (UVA) rays, and children need to be protected from both. UVB causes sunburns while UVA contributes to the risk of skin cancer and wrinkling. When choosing a sunscreen, parents should look for the words "broad-spectrum" on the label - it means that the sunscreen will protect against both UVB and UVA, providing protection against sunburn and helping to prevent skin cancer. Not all sunscreens are broad spectrum, so it is important to look for it on the label.

Sunscreens are made in a wide range of SPFs. SPF stands for "sun protection factor." It's the measure of how much UV radiation gets through the screen; the level of sunburn protection provided by the sunscreen. All sunscreens are tested to measure the amount of UV radiation exposure it takes to cause sunburn when using a sunscreen compared to how much UV exposure it takes to cause a sunburn without sunscreen. The product is then labeled with the appropriate SPF rating. The higher the number, the less UV passes through and the greater the protection. For example, an SPF of 30 allows one-thirtieth or 3.3% of UV to reach the skin. Higher SPF ratings (up to 50) provide greater sunburn protection. However, as SPF ratings are determined from a test that measures protection against UVB radiation only, it is important to make sure parents get broad spectrum sunscreen to protect against UVA as well.

There is a popular misconception that SPF relates to time of solar exposure. For example, many people believe that if they normally get sunburned in one hour, then an SPF 15 sunscreen allows them to stay in the sun for 15 hours (e.g., 15 times longer) without getting a sunburn. This is not true because SPF is not directly related to time of solar exposure, but to amount of solar exposure. To get the most protection out of sunscreen, parents should choose one with an SPF of at least 15. If a child has fair skin, parents may want a higher SPF of 30 to 50. The additional benefits of using sunscreen with an SPF over 50 are limited.

It is important for parents to remember that UV rays from the sun can reach their children on cloudy and hazy days, not just on bright and sunny days. Children need protection regardless of the amount of sunshine. Also, parents should try to limit sun exposure during the peak intensity hours - between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Parents should also be aware that no sunscreens are "waterproof." All sunscreens eventually wash off. Those labeled "water resistant" are required to state whether the sunscreen remains effective for 40 minutes or 80 minutes when swimming or sweating. When not swimming, it is best to re-apply sunscreen every two hours.

If a child does get a sunburn, parents can apply cool compresses to the affected area to relieve discomfort. Parents should contact their health care provider if a sunburn results in blistering, significant pain or fever.