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# Childcare and children's health

An information sheet for parents

## Health risks and benefits from the sun

The sun presents some serious health risks to children, but it also gives important health benefits. We need to protect children against the harmful effects of Ultra Violet (UV) radiation from the sun, but sun protection does not mean no sun exposure. You may have heard concerns about Vitamin D for children. Without some sun exposure, children may develop a condition that affects their bones. This condition is called rickets. Only small periods of sun exposure to a child's hands, arms and face are needed to protect children from this condition. Children usually receive enough sun for Vitamin D production from incidental sun exposure. Babies should not be directly exposed to the sun.

### *Five important sun protection measures*

#### **1. Sun protective clothing**

Choose loose fitting, close weave fabric clothing that covers as much skin as possible.

#### **2. Hats**

Hats should protect the face, neck and ears. Baseball caps and visors offer little protection to the cheeks, ears and neck and are not recommended. Suitable sun protection hats include:

- a soft legionnaire style hat, with a flap at the back that meets at the front peak
- a broad brimmed hat or a bucket style with a brim of at least 5 cm and a deep crown that sits easily on the child's head and still allows them to see and hear clearly

If the hat has a long strap and toggle, it may be safest to place the strap at the back of the child's head so it doesn't become a choking hazard.

#### **3. Sunscreen**

- Only use sunscreen with other forms of sun protection and on those small areas of the body not already covered by a hat and clothing. Don't use sunscreen to extend time spent out in the sun
- Sunscreens should only be used on babies if sun exposure is unavoidable, but shade and clothing provide the best protection. Don't expose babies under 12 months to direct sun
- Test the sunscreen on a small area of the child's skin before using it to make sure there's no reaction
- Use an SPF 30+ broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen; check and follow the sunscreens use by date
- Apply the sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside and reapply every two hours.

#### **4. Shade**

Use shade whenever possible. Even while in the shade, UV radiation can reflect from surfaces such as water, sand and concrete so children need to wear a hat, appropriate clothing and apply sunscreen.

#### **5. Sunglasses**

It is important to protect children's eyes from sun damage. Sunglasses and protective swimming goggles specifically designed for babies and toddlers are available.

Sunglasses should:

- be marked EPF (eye protection factor) 10 and meet the Australian Standard 1067 (Sunglasses – Category 2, 3 or 4)
- be close fitting and stay on securely so that the arms don't become a safety hazard
- wrap around and cover as much of the eye area as possible.

**Talk to your child's carers about sun exposure and their practices to protect your child's health.**



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