

Sun Safety: Protect yourself with these simple steps

by Dr. Delia Chiaramonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



The sun warms us and draws us outside at this time of year. It is glorious and powerful, but it can also be dangerous.

Are you doing all that you can to protect yourself from the sun's damaging rays? Here is a primer on sun safety:

- **What is all this talk about UVA and UVB rays?** For many years, we only worried about UVB rays. These are the rays that cause tanning and SPF refers to how well a sunscreen protects against UVB rays. Recently it has become clear that UVA rays are also dangerous, perhaps even more so than UVB rays, and they certainly contribute to skin cancer risk. Some sunscreens do not protect against UVA rays, so be sure to read the label carefully. Only use sunscreens that protect against both UVA and UVB rays.
- **Aren't tanning beds better than going out in the sun?** NO, no, no, no, no. Avoid tanning beds. Period.
- **When is the best time to put on sunscreen?** Put it on a half hour before going into the sun.
- **Do you really have to reapply it?** Yes. The effectiveness of the sunscreen wanes after about 2 hours, especially if you have been sweating a lot or have gone in the water. At the very least, reapply to your face, shoulders, chest and back.
- **As long as I use sunscreen, it doesn't matter how much sun I get, right?** WRONG! Even if you use sunscreen you should avoid the sun between 10am and 2pm when it is strongest. Some experts even recommend avoiding the sun between 10am and 4pm. Sunscreen isn't perfect and you are likely to get sun damage if you spend too much time in the strong noon-day sun, even if you slather on the sunscreen. If you must be out during those hours, be sure to wear a hat, a shirt to protect your shoulders, chest and back, and sunglasses to protect your eyes.
- **If I wear a T-shirt do I still need sunscreen?** Yes. A white T-shirt has an SPF of approximately 3. Darker colors and tighter fabric weaves provide slightly better protection.
- **How much sunscreen should I use?** Studies show that most people don't use enough. You should use about a shot glass full of sunscreen for an adult who is wearing a bathing suit. If you don't use that much, you aren't getting as much sun protection as you think.

It isn't just wrinkles or sunburn that you are trying to avoid. Melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, is the greatest risk of all.

So play in the morning, hang out inside or in the shade between 10 and 2, and then use a shot glass full of broad-spectrum (UVA and UVB) sunscreen before you venture out into the sun. Its simple, and it might just save your life.

- Dr. C

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