

## Childhood Skin Cancer Overview

Skin cancer is a potentially deadly disease caused by exposure to the sun. This condition affects only older adults, sparing the young. Right? Maybe not.

Don't ever assume that your children are immune to the sun's damaging rays. We live in a different world, and just because we were free to play endlessly in the sun as children, our kids don't have the same freedom. As a matter of fact, many adults are now facing skin cancer that has grown from the damage done decades ago.

As parents, teachers and caregivers, we must begin to protect our children now, and teach them how to protect themselves against damaged skin. Studies show that by the time he or she is a mere eighteen years old, the average person get will receive fifty percent of their lifetime's sun exposure. That's a lot of UV radiation in a relatively short time span.

You must be careful when taking your young children out to play. Never think that their innocent youth is somehow protecting them from the sun's ultraviolet rays. On the contrary, their skin is much more sensitive than our adult skin. So, when kids go to play in the yard, at the park or through the neighborhood, they need to be protected with sunscreen higher than the adult recommendation. Experts suggest that children use good sunscreen with an SPF, or sun protection factor, of no less than thirty. Every part of their bodies not covered by clothing must be well coated with a high SPF sunscreen. Like adults, children should wear hats to protect their heads and faces from ultraviolet exposure. Water does not offer any real protection from UV rays, so when you're in the pool or swimming at the beach, sunscreen is an absolute must. Toddlers and young children in wading pools are particularly vulnerable and must be protected. For water to offer any protection at all, the swimmer must be submerged at least a foot beneath the surface.

It can be challenging to protect adolescent children. For pre-teen and young teenagers, looking cool is all that matters, and they have no comprehension of the serious health risks that may face them in adulthood. This is the age when they begin to express themselves and show their individualities. They seek approval and take direction from their friends, rather than their parents. Many children become defiant at this age and love to prove to their friends that they're smarter than their parents. Adolescents are prone to sunbathing in order to be more attractive, and some even visit tanning beds. At this age, "today" is all that counts, and they couldn't care less what might happen thirty years from now. The unfortunate reality is that a lot can happen. Just a few serious sunburns in childhood or adolescence can greatly increase the risk of skin cancer later in life.

Older teenagers are a little more sensible about using sunscreen, although you'll still have your work cut out for you. Try appealing to their sense of vanity. Explain that without using the proper precautions, even at their age, they can experience peeling skin, blistering from a severe burn, or freckling. None of these will particularly appeal to the average teenager. Suggest a sunscreen that contains a moisturizer to improve the skin's appearance, or one of the new tinted sunscreens to create a tan-like glow. If the only way to get your son or daughter to wear a hat is by spending a few extra dollars on a super funky style, go ahead and do it. It might not be your style, but it will help to protect your child.

Although childhood skin cancer is rare, it can certainly happen; and any parent would agree that even the slightest chance of our children developing this devastating condition is too much. The key to protecting our kids in childhood, and keeping them safe through their adult years, is in practicing sun safety today.