

# Sun Safety

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As the days get longer and the temperatures get higher, many of us will likely spend more time outside enjoying the sunny spring days.

Although there are many health benefits tied to spending time outdoors, there is one potentially dangerous side effect of sun exposure that can be dangerous – skin cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, 3.3 million Americans have some type of skin cancer. Most diagnoses are caused by too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light and can be prevented. UV rays are an invisible kind of radiation that comes from the sun, tanning beds, and sunlamps.

As much as we all love being outside during the spring and summer months, it is important to keep your skin healthy.

The best place to start would reducing sun exposure, especially during the peak time of day for high UV index, which is between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. If you are planning to be outside for extended periods, wear protective gear such as hats, long sleeve shirts, pants, and sunglasses. Wear sunscreen daily, regardless of the season or weather forecast. UV rays can penetrate clouds and cause sunburns even when it's cloudy.

Some individuals are more sensitive to UV rays and need higher SPF sunscreens. Make sure to read the labels of sun lotions, gels, oils, and sprays to ensure it is the right fit for you. Apply sunscreen to all uncovered areas thirty minutes before going outside and reapply every 2 hours. Spots like the back of the neck, the tops of ears, and the back of the hands are easy to overlook but are usually the areas with the highest exposure. If you work up a sweat or go for a swim, make sure to apply it more often as sunscreen is not waterproof.

When choosing a sunscreen, avoid spray cans as they can be accidentally inhaled. They are also less likely to be applied in adequate amounts and can leave missed spots. Look for sunscreens that contain titanium dioxide or zinc oxide as the active ingredient. These chemicals are generally safer for children because they aren't absorbed into the skin. Avoid products that contain the chemicals oxybenzone, octinoxate (octylmethoxycinnamate), or retinyl palmitate/retinol/vitamin A. All have higher toxicity concerns associated with them. Always read and follow all label directions and precautions on sunscreen products. Some have specific warnings regarding the use on children.

If you notice a spot on your skin that changes in size, shape, color, or is itchy or painful, schedule an appointment with a dermatologist. A yearly check up with a skin doctor can help with early detection and prevention, especially for those with a family history of skin cancer.

Follow these tips to ensure you are enjoying your time outside safely and in a way that won't cause major health concerns now, or in years to come. For more information, contact Cassidy Lutz at [celutz@ksu.edu](mailto:celutz@ksu.edu) or by calling 620-625-8620.

