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Health, Wellness & Safety Committee

HOW TO PREVENT DAMAGING EFFECTS OF SUN EXPOSURE

DID YOU KNOW – Too much sun exposure is harmful. Kids don't have to be at the pool, on the playground, at the beach, or on vacation to get too much sun. Unprotected skin can be damaged by the sun's UV rays in as little as 15 minutes. Yet it can take up to 12 hours for skin to show the full effect of sun exposure. A child's skin can look a "little pink" one day and burned the next. Their skin needs protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays whenever anyone is outdoors.

WHAT TO KNOW – The sun releases energy over a broad spectrum of wavelengths. UV radiation, which has a shorter wavelength than visible light, is responsible for sunburns and other adverse health effects. Fortunately for life on Earth, a gas in the atmosphere called ozone screens most harmful UV radiation. What gets through the ozone layer, however, causes health problems, particularly for people who spend substantial time outdoors. Moreover, the ozone layer is gradually decreasing.

The Skin Cancer Foundation estimates that 80% of lifetime sun exposure occurs during childhood and just one blistering sunburn can double the risk of health consequences.

WHEN ARE CHILDREN MOST AT RISK - The sun is at its highest in the sky around noon. At that time the sun's rays have the shortest distance to travel through the atmosphere, and UV levels are at their highest. Even on cloudy, cool, or overcast days UV rays travel through the clouds and reflect off sand, water, and even concrete. This "invisible sun" can cause unexpected sunburn and skin damage. Often kids are unaware that they are developing a sunburn on cloudy, cooler, or windy days because the temperature or breeze keeps skin feeling cool on the surface.

WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY TO KEEP SAFE FROM SUN EXPOSURE - The Center for Disease Control & Prevention and other leading experts recommend the following ways to protect you and your children from harmful UV rays.

- **AVOID SUN EXPOSURE FROM 10:00 A.M. TO 3:00 P.M.** UV rays are strongest and most harmful during midday, so it's best to plan indoor activities then.
- **SEEK SHADE WHEN POSSIBLE.** Even when putting children under an umbrella it is important to know that sun reflects.
- **APPLY SUNSCREEN.** All exposed areas of skin should be liberally covered with water-resistant sunscreen that provides broad spectrum protection.
 - Apply about 20-30 minutes before going outside
 - Carry sunscreen with you to re-apply every two hours
 - Avoid using sunscreen as the only form of sun protection
- **COVER UP.** Clothing that covers the skin helps protect against UV rays. Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants. If you hold up a piece of clothing to the light and you can see your hand through it, you are not getting enough protection.
- **GET A HAT.** Hats shade the face, scalp, ears, and neck. Baseball caps are a favorite of kids, but they do not protect their ears and neck.

- **WEAR SUNGLASSES.** Sun exposure damages eyes as well and sunglasses protect the eyes. Toy sunglasses do not protect the eyes of children and can be even more dangerous for the eyes. The best sunglasses wrap around the eyes and provide 100% UVA/UVB protection.
- **APPLY LIP BALM.** Don't forget the lips. Apply lip balm with sun protection factor of at least 15.
- **MEDICATIONS.** "Keep Watch." Some medications increase the skin's sensitivity to the sun, so make sure to ask your doctor whether your child may be at risk. Prescription antibiotics and acne medications and certain chemotherapy are most important to ask about before being exposed to the sun.
- **GETTING A TAN.** There is no other way to say it – tanned skin is damaged skin. Any change in the color of your child's skin after time outside – whether sunburn or suntan – indicates damage from UV rays.
- **ALTITUDE.** UV radiation is more intense at a higher altitude, therefore, extra protection should be taken while in the snow such as: sunscreen, clothing (especially ears, neck, and head), and protecting your eyes from snow blindness. For snow sunglasses should have plastic instead of glass lenses for safety reasons.

SUN PROTECTION WHILE AT SCHOOL - In many Colorado schools districts, sun exposure curriculum has been introduced to help students understand importance of

- Sun safety at an early age
- Using sunscreen that says it provides BROAD SPECTRUM (i.e. both UVA & UVB) protection with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30
- Using protective eye wear and clothing while on the school playground and when participating in other outdoor recreational activities.

SET A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR YOUR KIDS – If your child sees you following sun-safety rules, he/she will take them for granted and follow suit. Skin protection is important for every member of the family, so team up with your children to stay protected when venturing out in the sun.

RESOURCES

- Center for Disease Control & Prevention, Skin Cancer Primary Prevention & Education (www.cdc.gov/cancer/nscpep)
- Center for Disease Control & Prevention, Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer (www.cdc.gov/cancer/nscpep/guidelines.htm)
- American Academy of Dermatology (www.aad.org)
- American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org)
- American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org)
- Center for Disease Control & Prevention, How Can I Protect My Children from the Sun (http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/children.htm)
- Colorado Shines in Sun Safety at School (<http://co.chalkbeat.org/2011/07/24/colorado-shines-in-sun-safety-at-school/#.u66paqpuht3A>)
- Kids Health (http://kidshealth.org/parent/firstaid_safe/outdoor/sun_safety.html)