

Buying Guide: Sunglasses for Children

Children under age 10 are at a high risk for skin and eye damage from ultraviolet (UV) rays. The skin on their eyelids and around their eyes is more delicate and vulnerable than adult skin. The lens coating the eye is clear, allowing greater UV penetration and thus greater damage to the eye.

Ultraviolet radiation (UVR) exposure causes 90 percent of all skin cancers. In addition, retinal exposure to UVR is associated with cataracts and macular degeneration, both causes of vision impairment. UVR damage builds over time, so the sooner you start protecting your children's eyes from the sun, the lower their risk will be of ever developing eye problems.

Sunglasses help protect both the skin around the eye and the eye itself. Children under 6 months old should never be exposed to the sun. Once children reach 6 months, they should wear sunglasses outside.

The Skin Cancer Foundation and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommend the guidelines below. Keep them in mind when buying sunglasses for children.

- Purchase sunglasses that block 99 – 100 percent of both UVA and UVB rays. The more skin covered, the better, so look for large wrap-around styles.
- Use playground proof lenses. Kids run, trip, fall and bounce off objects at an alarming speed. Their sunglasses should match this active lifestyle. You can find impact-resistant, scratch-proof lenses that do not pop out of frames.
- Let them choose. You're not the one who has to wear the glasses or hear the other kids' comments about them. Children are more likely to wear the glasses that they select themselves.
- If your child wears prescription eyeglasses, it would be good to purchase prescription sunglasses.
- Make sure the lenses are not scratched or warped and have no other flaws that distort vision. Very young children may not know to complain if the glasses are flawed.
- Double up. Sunglasses block only rays that come through the lenses. The skin around the eyes remains vulnerable to rays entering from the side or the top. Rays are also reflected upwards off snow, sand or water. Wearing a wide-brimmed hat is a good backup, to help block out rays while shielding the face and neck. Seeking shade during the sun's most intense hours – from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., – provides another level of protection.

Adapted from: <http://www.skincancer.org/prevention/sun-protection/children/choosing-sunglasses-for-your-kids>



Learn To Live

Anne Arundel County Department of Health
LearnToLiveHealthy.org
410-222-7979