

National Coalition for Infant Health: Sun Exposure and Infants

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The National Coalition for Infant Health is a collaborative of more than 200 professional, clinical, community health, and family support organizations focused on improving the lives of premature infants through age two and their families. NCfIH's mission is to promote lifelong clinical, health, education, and supportive services needed by premature infants and their families. NCfIH prioritizes safety of this vulnerable population and access to approved therapies.

Protecting a little one from direct sunlight is crucial when taking an infant outdoors, whether for a leisurely stroll in the park or a day at the beach. Sunscreen is often inadequate to protect a baby from direct sunlight fully.

Infants have delicate skin that is particularly susceptible to severe sunburn. However, the use of sunscreen is not typically recommended for infants under six months old, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). (1) This advice is because infants are more prone to experiencing side effects from sunscreen, such as rashes, than adults.

The FDA and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly advise against exposing newborns and infants un-

Steering Committee

The National Coalition for Infant Health is supported by a volunteer steering committee, all of whom contribute significantly to lives of premature infants through work and parenting. Steering committee members represent national nonprofits, academic institutions, and parent organizations, and they provide leadership as well as help to mobilize partners in the field of prematurity.



der six months to direct sunlight. The most effective way to protect these young children from the harmful effects of the sun is by keeping them in the shade. Natural shade, such as that provided by trees, is ideal, but shade can be created using a beach umbrella, pop-up tent, or stroller's canopy. (2)

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Keeping babies out of the sun during peak hours between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. is crucial. During these times, the sun's rays are at their most intense, and the risk of exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is highest. If a baby must be outdoors during these hours, it is imperative to take additional precautions. Always consult a pediatrician before applying sunscreen to infants younger than six months.

The AAP recommends dressing infants in lightweight clothing that covers the arms and legs, such as long pants and long-sleeve shirts. It is also essential to ensure that the baby wears a hat with a brim that shades the neck rather than a baseball cap, which does not protect the neck or ears—both of which are susceptible areas for an infant. When selecting fabrics, opt for those with tight weaves, as they provide better protection against UV rays than loose weaves. (2)

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Always keep an infant in the shade and consult a pediatrician before applying sunscreen to protect an infant from the sun. Dress

babies in long-sleeved, lightweight clothing and ensure they wear a hat that shades their face, neck, and ears. Monitor for signs of sunburn or dehydration, such as fussiness, redness, and excessive crying, and if sunburn occurs, remove the baby from the sun, apply cold compresses, and contact a pediatrician immediately. Keep babies well-hydrated by offering formula or breast milk frequently, and pack a cooler to keep liquids fresh and cool.

References:

1. <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/should-you-put-sunscreen-infants-not-usually?%20not%20usually>
2. Council on Environmental Health and Section on Dermatology; Ultraviolet Radiation: A Hazard to Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics* March 2011; 127 (3): 588–597. 10.1542/peds.2010-3501

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National Coalition for Infant Health Values (SANE)

Safety. Premature infants are born vulnerable. Products, treatments and related public policies should prioritize these fragile infants' safety.

Access. Budget-driven health care policies should not preclude premature infants' access to preventative or necessary therapies.

Nutrition. Proper nutrition and full access to health care keep premature infants healthy after discharge from the NICU.

Equality. Prematurity and related vulnerabilities disproportionately impact minority and economically disadvantaged families. Restrictions on care and treatment should not worsen inherent disparities.