



A Message from Dr. Robben

It's finally here... summer! Time to hit the pool, go to camp, and play outside way past bedtime. I'm here to address two problems that can put the brakes on fun- sunburns and insect bites. As pediatricians, we love preventative medicine, and that is the best way to tackle these two concerns.

The information in this article is a combination of recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and my personal professional opinion. I have personally used all the products I list here on myself or my son. I only give examples of products to use because people often ask, but these lists certainly do not contain every good product. It's most important to use what you can easily find and enjoy using.

Sunburns:

Sunburns can happen in people of all skin colors, they just occur faster in people with lighter skin. It is important to prevent sunburns to prevent skin cancer in the future, and pain and suffering in the present.

For all children: It is recommended to minimize time in the sun between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM, when the sun's rays are the strongest. Unfortunately, that is when a lot of us like to be outside! Protective clothing can be very helpful – hats, shirts, shorts, sunglasses with SPF (sun protection factor) can be easily found at most big chain stores like Target, Wal-Mart, or ordered on-line from places like Amazon.

Sunscreens: You want to look for one labeled "broad spectrum" and that has a SPF of at least 15. I personally recommend SPF 30-50. Mineral-based sunscreens are generally thought of as safer because they have less chemicals. They are usually made with zinc oxide (the same thing that is in most diaper creams), or titanium dioxide, as the ingredients that work to prevent burning. Their downside is that they can be difficult to rub in and leave a sticky white layer on the skin or clothing. Every brand is different, so if you hate one, give another one a try. For other sunscreens, the main chemical to avoid is oxybenzone. It can possibly affect human hormones.

You need to apply the sunscreen to all exposed areas 15-30 minutes before being in the sun and let it dry. To make sure you don't miss any areas, I find the easiest way to do this is to apply a good layer all over the body at home before putting on a swimsuit or clothes. Put a towel down on your car seats if you are worried about getting your car sticky. (*By car seat I mean the actual seats in the car, not infant/toddler car seats. Never put extra padding in those, it makes them less effective). When you get to your destination, your kids will be ready to go! You need to reapply sunscreen every 1-2 hours for it to work like it should. Towel off as best

you can and allow it to dry for at least 15 minutes before getting back out there. This can be a good time for kids to sit and drink some water to stay hydrated– multitasking!

For children under 6 months it is recommended to keep them out of direct sunlight as much as possible. Most stroller shades have SPF in them which is helpful. You can also buy sun shades or tents that have SPF where the baby can rest. It is safe to put mineral-based sunscreens on infants, but just the exposed areas are recommended. This is where those full body swimsuits can make life easier. I used them last summer at the beach with my 18-month-old. It was much easier than trying to rub down his entire body with sunscreen.

My favorite brands: Think Baby, Coppertone Pure and Simple, Blue Lizard, Neutrogena Baby Pure and Free

A note on spray sunscreens – Most of us use them because they are easy! They have a bad reputation because they tend to have more chemicals in them and don't work as well as lotions. If you pick one without harmful chemicals and you apply them to dry skin, rub them in, and let them sit for at least 15 minutes before getting in the sun, they can be okay. I would avoid spraying them near the face and eyes and using them on infants where the risk of the inhaling the sunscreen is greater.

What to do if you have tried all of the above and still end up with a burn:

Treat pain with acetaminophen or ibuprofen (if the child is over 6 months), cool cloths, and room temperature baths. Pure aloe is fine to put on burns, but many over the counter sunburn relief lotions and gels have pain relieving chemicals that may not be safe for young children. Encourage fluids to keep hydrated. It is important to let the sunburn heal before getting back out into the sun. All the more reason to try to prevent one. No one likes missed fun. If your child has fever, signs of dehydration, or significant blistering from the sunburn, please call us!

Insect bites:

The best way to protect your children from insect bites (mosquitos, ticks, gnats, chiggers) is insect repellent. Insect repellent is safe to use on children 2 months and older. For infants younger than 2 months, mosquito netting is recommended. Sometimes you get lucky and some comes with your stroller. Keeping them close to you and trying to fend off the bugs has been my strategy in the past. Luckily there are more options past that age. The main categories of bug spray are ones with DEET, picaridin, or natural products. DEET and picaridin are safe to use over 2 months of age. Natural products containing oil of lemon are recommended only above 3 years of age. DEET and picaridin containing bug sprays last longer than natural ones. They usually only need to be applied once to work for many hours. In the past, there was some concern for toxicity from DEET, but more recent studies have shown it is safe. If you are worried about DEET, picaridin is a great alternative. It is man-made chemical similar to a natural chemical in some plants.

Most bug sprays are fine for outside play when the sun goes down and the bugs come out. If you are going to be in an area with a lot of insects, especially ticks, you want to choose an option with a higher percentage of DEET, no higher than 30%. Examples would be camping, or hiking through the woods. Another way to protect your child from insect bites in this situation is to wear long sleeves and long pants made from light material. Tuck shirts in and tuck pants into socks. A funny summer look, but it is effective.

My favorite brands: DEET based - Off Family Care Smooth and Dry (15%) (who wants to be sticky when you are already sweating), Deep Woods Off (25%). Picaridin based – Off Family Care Picaridin Spray, Sawyer Picaridin Spray, Ranger Ready (the last two are available on Amazon). Natural sprays – I've never found one that works. Again, if you have one that you love and works, use it!

For children, I recommend washing or wiping off the bug spray before bed. If you have been in an area where ticks are common – do a “tick check.” Check all crevices and cracks (groin, armpits) and make sure none are hiding on your child.

What to do when bites happen:

Wash bites with regular soap and water. Try to encourage your child to avoid scratching the bite. It is okay to use antihistamines like Zyrtec, Claritin, and Benadryl if old enough to help with the itch. Over the counter 1% hydrocortisone cream can also be applied. If there is broken skin, wash daily with soap and water, and apply an antibiotic ointment to prevent infection. Insect bites from mosquitos and gnats can often look large and inflamed, but rarely cause dangerous allergic reactions. The main risk is bacterial infection from scratching. If you are concerned that a bite is infected, call us! Ticks are another story. There is too much to say about tick bites to fit in this article. If you are worried your child has tick that was not completely removed from the skin, any redness, swelling, rash around the bite, or any new signs of illness after a tick bite, call us!

And yes, it is okay to use sunscreen and bug spray at the same time. Apply sunscreen first as directed, then the bug spray. Combination products are not recommended.

I hope this information helps keep you safe from the sun during the day and from the bugs at night so you can enjoy summer to the fullest. If you have any specific questions about this information or your child, please call our office.