

# Should You Put Sunscreen on Infants? Not Usually

**Y**ou're at the beach, slathered in sunscreen. Your 5-month-old baby is there, too. Should you put sunscreen on her? Not usually, according to Hari Cheryl Sachs, M.D., a pediatrician at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

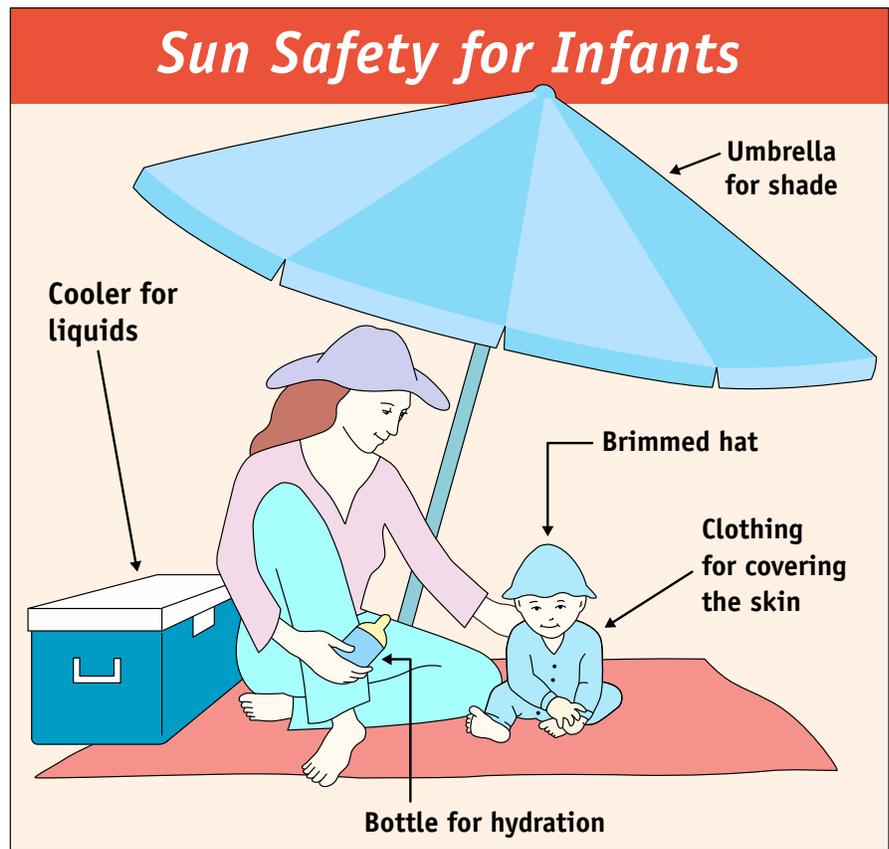
"The best approach is to keep infants under 6 months out of the sun," Sachs says, "and to avoid exposure to the sun in the hours between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when ultraviolet (UV) rays are most intense."

Sunscreens are recommended for children and adults. What makes babies so different?

"Babies' skin is less mature compared to adults, and infants have a higher surface-area to body-weight ratio compared to older children and adults," explains Sachs. "Both these factors mean that an infant's exposure to the chemicals in sunscreens may be much greater, increasing the risk of side effects from the sunscreen."

"The best protection is to keep your baby in the shade, if possible," Sachs says. "If there's no natural shade, create your own with an umbrella or the canopy of the stroller."

"If there's no way to keep an infant out of the sun, you should check with your pediatrician about what to do for your baby." If your pediatrician agrees, you can apply a small amount of sunscreen—with a sun protection



FDA graphic by Michael J. Ermarth

**Here are some of the most important ways to protect your infant from the harmful rays of the sun:**

- an umbrella and wide brimmed hat for shade,
- a cooler for liquids,
- a bottle for hydration, and
- clothing for covering the skin.

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factor (SPF) of at least 15—to small areas such as the cheeks and back of the hands. Sachs suggests testing your baby’s sensitivity to sunscreen by first trying a small amount on the inner wrist.

### Cover Up

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggests dressing infants in lightweight long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and brimmed hats that shade the neck to prevent sunburn. Tight weaves are better than loose. Keep in mind that while baseball caps are cute, they don’t shade the neck and ears, sensitive areas for a baby.

Summer’s heat presents other challenges for babies.

“Younger infants also don’t sweat like we do”, Sachs says. “Sweat naturally cools the rest of us down when we’re hot, but babies haven’t yet fully developed that built-in heating-and-cooling system. So you want to make sure your baby doesn’t get overheated.”

“In the heat, babies are also at greater risk of becoming dehydrated. To make sure they’re adequately hydrated, offer them their usual feeding of breast milk or formula”, says Sachs. “The water content in both will help keep them well hydrated.

Providing water in between these feedings is also okay.”

### Sun Safety Tips for Infants

Here are some things to keep in mind this summer when outside with infants:

- Keep your baby in the shade as much as possible.
- Consult your pediatrician before using any sunscreen on your baby. If you do use a small amount of sunscreen on your baby, don’t assume the child is well protected.
- Make sure your child wears clothing that covers and protects sensitive skin. Use common sense; if you hold the fabric against your hand and it’s so sheer that you can see through it, it probably doesn’t offer enough protection.
- Make sure your baby wears a hat that provides sufficient shade at all times.
- Watch your baby carefully to make sure he or she doesn’t show warning signs of sunburn or dehydration. These include fussiness, redness and excessive crying.
- Hydrate! Give your baby formula, breast milk, and offer water between feedings if you’re out in the sun for more than a few

minutes. Don’t forget to use a cooler to store the liquids.

- Take note of how much your baby is urinating. If it’s less than usual, it may be a sign of dehydration, and that more fluids are needed until the flow is back to normal.
- Avoid combination sunscreens containing insect repellants like DEET. Young children may lick their hands or put them in their mouths. According to the AAP, DEET should not be used on infants less than 2 months old.
- If you do notice your baby is becoming sunburned, get out of the sun right away and apply cold compresses to the affected areas. 

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