

July is UV Safety Month

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Offers Safety Summer Tips

Are you enjoying your summer? Did you know summer brings the longest days giving us more time to spend outdoors having fun? From vacations, biking, and hiking, or just enjoying ice cream, watermelons, or popsicles, summer brings memories of younger days and family togetherness. As we enjoy making new memories, we can plan for a safe summer by reducing the risk of harmful effects of UV exposure. July has been designated as Ultraviolet (UV) Safety Month by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; whose goal is to spread the word on the harmful effects of UV rays on unprotected skin.

Ultraviolet light is radiation emitted naturally from the sun, but can also be man-made, an example being tanning beds. Classified in wavelengths, UVC light is blocked by the Earth's ozone layer, but the sun's UVA & UVB affect the skin differently with UVA causing wrinkling (premature aging) due to penetrating deeper into the skin and UVB causing sunburns. Overexposure increases risk of developing skin cancer. Cautions are placed on the times of exposure due to UV radiation being strongest between 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

A benefit of UV radiation is Vitamin D production, which helps calcium and phosphorous to be absorbed by the body and helps in bone development. According to the World Health Organization, 5 to 15 minutes of sun exposure 2 to 3 times a week is recommended. Prolonged UV exposure can cause premature aging, cataracts, and skin cancer, not to mention painful sunburns. The most dangerous UV radiation is artificial indoor tanning. "By taking precautions before we head out the door for summer activities and all-year round, we can reduce the risk of UV radiation by following some simple steps," states Julie Tijerina, Extension Program Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

Here are some recommended safety tips to protect the skin during exposure from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Specialist Tijerina:

- **Stay in the shade:** Look for shaded areas under trees or bring an umbrella or pop-up shelter, especially during peak hours. Know the EPA's shadow rule: If your shadow is taller than you are, UV exposure is lower. If your shadow is shorter than you, UV exposure is higher. Remember that surfaces, such as water, snow, white sand, and cement, reflect the sun's damaging rays and can increase chances of sunburn. Cloudy days do not block the sun's rays, which are just filtered. In higher altitudes, UV exposure is higher due to less atmosphere to absorb UV radiation.
- **Wear Protective clothing:** Thanks to clothing, the skin is partially shielded from UV rays. It is best to wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants made from tightly woven fabric. Be aware that wet clothes offer less protection than dry ones and dark colors offer more protection than light ones. To cover your face and neck, wear wide-brimmed hats.
- **Protect the eyes:** Not only do sunglasses help protect the eyes from UV rays, they also reduce cataract risk later in life. Choose UV resistant sunglasses that wrap around and block both UVA and UVB rays; polarized sunglasses just reduce glare.

- **Use Sunscreen:** Sunscreen works by absorbing, reflecting and scattering sunlight from our skin. The SPF (Sun Protection Factor) number measures how well it blocks UV rays, with higher numbers offering more protection. Don't forget to check the expiration date, those without a date are good for three years, and less if they have been exposed to high temperatures. An SPF of at least 15, offers protection against both UVA and UVB (broad spectrum) radiation. Purchasing the right SPF sunscreen depends on what exposure you will be having fun in. Apply broad-spectrum sunscreen twenty minutes before you head out. Reapply every two hours, after swimming, toweling off, or sweating.
- **Avoid Indoor Tanning** – According to the CDC, the UV radiation from “indoor tanning significantly increases the risk of developing melanoma, basal, and squamous cell cancers.” It also causes premature aging of the skin and suppresses the immune system.
- **Learn about the UV Index:** In as little as 15 minutes, the sun's UV rays can cause damage to unprotected skin. Plan to check the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's UV Index (<https://www.epa.gov/enviro/uv-index-search>) to determine your favorite vacation spot's UV radiation intensity. Rated on a scale from 1-11, suggestions are offered on how much protection one should plan for.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension offers programming to fit your community's needs. There are some Sun Safety Fact sheets: *Ultraviolet (UV) Radiation and Your Eyes* and *Children and Sun Safety*. For more information, visit your local health department, or ask for more information on sun safety from your local County Extension office at (counties.agrilife.org) or by calling 817-598-6168.