

Sunscreen Guidance

Choose carefully, 75% of sunscreens have issues

As we enter the unofficial start of summer, our thoughts turn to getting outside. The beach, water, and woods are calling, and Wisconsin has lots of great places for any outdoor activity you seek. Sunscreens are an important tool in the fight against skin cancer. Most of us are aware we should use sunscreen but are the sunscreens we choose for protection doing what they are supposed to? Is higher SPF better? Since 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime and the fact that having 5 or more sunburns doubles our risk for melanoma, using a good sunscreen is key for prevention (source: [Skin Cancer Foundation](#)). The Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit research and advocacy group just issued its annual [Guide to Sunscreens](#) and found that only about one in four products met their standards for adequate sun protection and avoids ingredients linked to known health harms.



Selected take-home points

- *Don't rely on sunscreen alone to prevent skin cancer. Avoiding the highest sun times, limiting the time of exposure, and adding hats, clothing, and sunglasses are important strategies for protection.*
- *Sunscreens designed for kids are generally safer than others (1 in 3 meet standards)*
- *Skip spray sunscreens if possible. Some spray sunscreens may be contaminated with cancer-causing benzene. Inhalation of fumes during application can also be problematic.*
- *Using higher SPF levels (over 30-50) is not beneficial.*
 - *Most sunscreens failed to show reliable protection from UVB rays, the main cause of sunburn.*
 - *UVA ray protection was only a quarter of the SPF value. High variation in UVA protection among products with the same SPF ratings. AS SPF rises, the ratio of UVA protection decreases. UVA is associated with long-term skin damage, wrinkles, and skin cancer.*
 - *While higher SPF suppresses UVB sunburn marginally more effectively it leaves people susceptible to UVA-induced damage, including the development of melanoma.*
 - *This results in people being overconfident in their sunscreen protection and staying in the sun longer.*
 - *High SPF products require higher concentrations of sun-filtering chemicals than low SPF sunscreens do which can have adverse effects*
- *Properly applied SPF 30 sunscreen blocks 97% of UVB rays; SPF 50 sunscreen blocks 98 percent of UVB rays; SPF 100 blocks 99 percent. When used correctly, sunscreen with SPF values between 30 and 50 offers adequate sunburn protection, even for people most sensitive to sunburn.*
- *People tend to apply only one-half to one-fifth of the amount of sunscreen used in laboratory studies, resulting in less protection than thought. Reapply generously and often.*
- *Oxybenzone is a common active ingredient in sunscreen, found in about 15 percent of the products assessed this year, has been found to be an endocrine (hormone) disruptor and should be used with caution in children. Information on other potentially toxic ingredients [is here](#). For this reason, mineral-type sunscreens are preferred in children and adolescents.*

Apply your sunscreen early (30 minutes before going out), liberally (1 oz – golf ball size amount every application), and often (every 2 hours – more often if swimming or sweating). Then get out and enjoy your summer activities!

For a list of the best sunscreens for daily use, kid's use, and recreation: [EWG's Guide to Sunscreens](#)