

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States with more than a million new cases diagnosed each year. However, 90% of all skin cancers can be prevented by protection from the sun's rays or ultraviolet radiation. Eighty percent of total lifetime sun exposure is received during childhood and kids receive three times as much ultraviolet radiation as adults do in a year.

Reading a sunscreen package label to protect from damaging ultraviolet radiation can be confusing. SPF 15, 30, or 40? Ultraviolet A or B Rays? Broad Spectrum? New federal labeling requirements taking effect in June 2012 will make package labels look a bit different.

Every sunscreen, as well as any makeup or moisturizer that contains it, must identify the degree of Sun Protection Factor (SPF), its water-resistance, and whether or not it's broad-spectrum (provides both UVA and UVB protection).

Janelle Hansen, health educator with Panhandle Public Health District recommends a sunblock with an SPF of at least 15 or higher for adults and SPF 30 or higher for children. She noted, "This can reduce some types of skin cancer by nearly 78%" adding, "Using water-resistant sunscreen even when you're not at the pool or lake is important because sweating can reduce the effectiveness."

A large dollop of sunscreen is enough to cover your body, but be sure to add a second coat to your nose, lips, hands, ears, and the tops of your feet. These are areas that frequently tend to burn.

Slopping on sunscreen is just one of several protective measures for sun safety in addition to:

- Limiting time in the sun, especially between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm when the sun's rays are the strongest.
- Wearing clothing to cover skin exposed to the sun (long-sleeved shirts, pants, sunglasses, and broad-brimmed hats) when possible.
- Seeking shaded spots when possible.
- Reapplying sunscreen at least every two hours or sooner in accordance with label directions.

"Be aware of the medications you are taking," Hansen said, "Certain medications can heighten your sun sensitivity so talking to your doctor and checking medication side effects is essential." She concluded, "Visiting a dermatologist is an important preventative checkup so be sure to do so annually."

Area pools encourage positive sun safety for children, their families and staff through the Pool Cool program. The program has been shown to improve children's sun safety habits and sunscreen use by providing sunscreen and sun protection lessons in addition to displaying sun safety signs and tips.

For more information on sun safety or the Pool Cool program, visit [www.pphd.org](http://www.pphd.org). The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.