

Sunburn: Brief Version

What is a sunburn?

If your child spends too much time in the sun without sunscreen, the skin can burn. You'll see the sunburn about 2 to 4 hours after your child has been out in the sun. Minor sunburn turns your child's skin pink or red. Even after 24 hours, your child's skin may hurt, look red, and swell. A bad sunburn may cause blisters.

How can I take care of my child?

For pain:

- Give your child ibuprofen (Advil) right away. Keep giving it for 2 days.
- Put 1% hydrocortisone cream on your child 3 times a day. Put it on for 2 days. This will help reduce the swelling and pain.
- Give cool baths, or put cold, wet cloths on the burned area.
- Have your child drink extra water. When your child drinks more water, it helps to stop fluid loss and dizziness.
- Your child's skin may peel in about a week. Put a cream on the skin.

For broken blisters:

- Trim off the dead skin with small scissors. First clean the scissors with rubbing alcohol.
- Wash off the blisters and put on antibiotic ointment two times a day. Do this for 3 days.

How can I help prevent sunburn?

- Put sunscreen on your child if your child will be outdoors for more than 30 minutes. Have your child wear a hat.
- Some children sunburn easily or are at risk for skin cancer, especially if they have:
 - Red or blond hair.
 - Blue or green eyes.
 - Freckles.
 - Lots of moles.

Your child may need to stay out of the sun, avoid tanning beds, or use a sunscreen every day in the summer.

Call your child's doctor right away if:

- Your child starts to act very sick.
- Your child has a fever.

Call your child's doctor during office hours if:

- The sunburn has red streaks or yellow pus
- You have other questions or concerns.

Written by Barton D. Schmitt, MD, author of “My Child Is Sick,” American Academy of Pediatrics Books.

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