

FACT SHEET:

sun exposure



Heat-related illness is likely to occur when the body is unable to cool itself sufficiently.¹

The Queensland extreme summer heat is when the majority of heat-related illness occurs.² Queensland has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world, and sun exposure in the first 10 years of life determines the potential for skin cancer later in life.³ While it is important for your child to receive vitamin D from the sun for healthy bone growth and development, be SMART about the sun!⁴

The risks

Due to their small body size and developing nervous system, children are less efficient than adults at cooling their core temperature down.⁵

Being exposed to the sun between 10am and 3pm is a common cause of heat-related illness.²

Most presentations of children at hospital for heat-related illness are due to exposure to sun while at the beach or on boats, with parents believing their child was in the shade and/or had sunscreen on.¹ The risk is greatest in summer, during heatwaves or when temperatures stays above average for three or more days.²

Injuries^{1,2}

Heat rash – a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating and most common in young children.

Sunburn – as children's skin is particularly sensitive, they are more susceptible to sunburn. Sunburn can cause mild or severe skin damage.

Heat exhaustion – is the body's response to gradual depletion of fluid and salt due to sweating. *Warning signs:* cool, moist and pale skin, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea, vomiting and fainting.

Heat stroke – can be fatal when the body temperature rises above 41°C and is unable to cool down. This can occur rapidly over a 10-15 minute period. *Warning signs:* extreme body temperature, skin is dry and unable to sweat, rapid pulse, headache, dizziness and nausea.

Prevention^{1,2}

Ensure children drink plenty of fluids during hot weather (don't wait until they're thirsty to drink). Urine colour is a good indication of hydration. Clear and light, straw-coloured urine indicates good hydration. Dark and golden urine indicates poor hydration.

Keep children out of the sun from 10am to 3pm.

Never leave your child alone in the car (*see the factsheet on hot cars*).

Infants under six months – should be kept out of the sun as their skin is too sensitive for sunscreen.

After the age of six months – ensure children wear sun protection products such as sunsuits, swim hats or wide-brimmed hats, as well as water-resistant sunscreen when outdoors. Reapply sunscreen every two hours or

after swimming or sweating. Create shade for your child to play under.

Although children under four years are the most sun-protected age group, it is important children learn sun safety from an early age!⁵ Be a role model – children are more likely to use sun protection measures if parents and other adults do.

First aid¹

For heat rash, keep the affected area dry. Ointments, powders or creams may make the

condition worse.

At the first signs of dehydration, immediately move your child to the shade, remove excess clothing and give them fluids to cool them down.

Seek medical attention if the child does not improve.

If your child is suffering from heat stroke, do not give them fluids unless you are confident they can swallow properly.

Seek urgent medical attention.

Sources

1. Queensland Health Factsheet – health.qld.gov.au
2. Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit, Injury Bulletin no.89, Burns and Scalds in Queensland Toddlers.
3. Queensland Government – safer.qld.gov.au/Safety/Child/weather.html
4. Cancer Council – cancer.org.au/position/vitD (Cancer Council Helpline, ph. 13 11 20)
5. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Excessive sun exposure: aihw.gov.au/excessive-sun-exposure

REMEMBER:

Slip, Slop, Slap, Slide and Seek

Slip on sun protective clothing that covers as much of your body as possible.

Slop on SPF 30+ broad spectrum sunscreen liberally to dry skin, at least 20 minutes before sun exposure. Reapply every two hours when outdoors.

Slap on a broad-brimmed hat that shades your face, neck and ears.

Slide on sunglasses.

Seek shade.