

Sunscreen Guide 2014

By Dr. Flora Kim



Skin cancer is caused primarily by unprotected exposure to the sun, meaning it's often preventable with sunscreen and clothing which protect the skin from too much exposure to the sun. Although sunscreen is readily available, skin cancer rates continue to climb. Why?

Until recently, there were no real standards for how sunscreen manufacturers labeled their products. Experts are hopeful that new labeling guidelines by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will help reduce the incidents of skin cancer in the U.S.

Cooper Clinic Preventive and Cosmetic Dermatologist Flora Kim, MD, FAAD, explains the new FDA guidelines and how to properly use sunscreen to reduce risk of skin cancer.

New FDA Guidelines

New FDA guidelines are intended to make it easier for consumers to know how much protection a particular sunscreen does or does not provide. The use of the label "broad spectrum protection" means the sunscreen has been proven to protect against both UVA and UVB rays (although UVA protection might be weaker than UVB protection). In the past, a sunscreen could be labeled as "broad spectrum" even if it only protected against UVB rays.

When it comes to SPF, any sunscreen lower than SPF 15 must be clearly labeled that it will not protect against skin cancer, but will only prevent sunburn. Sunscreen with an SPF over 15 that is labeled as "broad spectrum" can be labeled as preventing sunburn, skin cancer and aging due to the sun.

Any sunscreen over SPF 50 will now be labeled as SPF 50+, as there is speculation that an SPF higher than 50 is not actually more effective. Additionally, people may be more likely to apply sunscreen with an SPF over 50 less frequent-

ly because they think it provides more protection, when in fact, it does not.

Manufacturers are no longer allowed to use words like “waterproof,” “sweat proof” or “sunblock” as these terms are misleading. What you might see on sunscreen labels instead is “water-resistant” with a time limit of 40 or 80 minutes before the sunscreen becomes ineffective.

It is important to know that these new FDA guidelines are still in the process of becoming completely enforced, as it takes time for manufacturers to submit required documentation to change labeling. It is always important to read the label of any sunscreen product you are considering.

Recommendations for Sunscreen Use

The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends wearing an SPF of 30 or higher every day, not only when you are lying out by the pool or on the beach. The sun’s rays can still be damaging, even on a cloudy day.

Most people do not put on enough sunscreen. In fact, according to the AAD, most people only apply about 25 to 50% of what they should put on to be fully protected. As a general guideline, you should generously apply one ounce to all areas of the skin that will be exposed to the sun.

Sunscreen should be applied to dry skin 15 minutes before you go outside and reapplied every two hours, or after swimming or heavy sweating.

What about Makeup and Moisturizers?

Some cosmetic products and moisturizers do contain a small amount of SPF, but if you are trying to protect yourself from sun damage or skin cancer that will not be sufficient protection. Dr. Kim recommends an application of dedicated sunscreen underneath your moisturizer and makeup rather than relying on the SPF of your cosmetic products.

Ultimately, you must remember that no sunscreen is perfect. Wearing long sleeves and a hat and staying in the shade as much as possible are also important precautions



to take to prevent sun damage or potentially deadly skin cancer.

Dr. Flora Kim is a dermatologist at Cooper Clinic. For more information about cosmetic and preventive dermatology at Cooper Clinic, call 972-367-6000.



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