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Can you share sunscreen with your kid?

Sunscreens are specifically marketed towards babies, kids and adults, but if you have a family that spans several life stages, do you have to tote around a separate bottle for everyone? We asked a dermatologist.



BY CHARLOTTE HERROLD | MAY 4, 2018



Wondering if you can share sunscreen with your kid and carry one less bottle in your beach bag? According to Sonya Abdulla, a dermatologist at Dermatology on Bloor in Toronto, the difference between sunscreen for adults and kids comes down to potential skin irritants. Most drugstore formulas contain ingredients like oxybenzone and avobenzone, which work by absorbing UV rays and dissipating them as heat through a chemical reaction. While these ingredients are effective, they aren't the best for those with reactive skin. And because babies and kids generally have more sensitivities, sun care products made with them in mind often avoid these potentially irritating ingredients.

“Children’s formulations tend to limit fragrance and are often mineral-based, with zinc oxide and titanium dioxide,” Abdulla explains. These sun barriers don’t penetrate the skin but rather sit on top and act like a mirror to reflect the sun’s rays. But not all kids’ sunscreens are mineral-based, so if your child

When it comes to babies, Health Canada suggests keeping them out of direct

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sunlight and not using sunscreen until after six months of age. “Physical protection, like clothing and shade, is the strategy of choice for babies,” says Abdulla. “But limited amounts of mineral sunscreen can be applied on exposed areas that may be more difficult to cover, like the face, hands and feet.”

The good news is that more and more sunscreen manufacturers are becoming savvy to the benefits of reducing chemicals, even in products marketed to adults. Many are now offering broad-spectrum mineral-based sunscreens, which start working the minute you put them on. If you use these products, you can feel comfortable sharing them with your kids. Whatever sunscreen you choose, Abdulla recommends a minimum of SPF 30 and suggests reapplying every two hours, or after swimming or heavy sweating.



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