

# Four common sunscreen questions



Use this information to help you advise your customers about sunscreen use.

## 1. How do sunscreens filter the sun's rays?

Sunscreens may contain **physical** or **chemical** barriers to screen skin against the sun's ultraviolet radiation (UV radiation). While physical barriers reflect or scatter the UV rays, chemical barriers act by absorbing the UV radiation before it hits the skin.

General advice is to choose a sunscreen which is **broad spectrum**, which means it filters both UVA and UVB rays. Those who have sensitive skin should choose a sunscreen labelled hypoallergenic or low irritant.

### Typical chemical absorbers include:

- » **Aminobenzoic acid derivatives** (Glyceryl PABA, Padimate O, Roxadimate)
- » **Benzophenones** (Dioxybenzone, Oxybenzone, Sulisonbenzone)
- » **Cinnamates** (Octocrylene, Octyl methoxycinnamate (octinoxate), Ethoxyethyl p-methoxycinnamate (cinoxate))

### Use the five SunSmart steps



slip, slop, slap, and wrap

- » **Salicylates** (Homomenthyl salicylate (homosalate), Ethylhexyl salicylate (octyl salicylate/octisalate), Trolamine salicylate)
- » **Avobenzone** (butyl methoxydibenzoylmethane)
- » **Ecamsule** (terephthalylidene dicamphor sulfonic acid; Mexoryl SX)
- » **Ensulizole** (phenylbenzimidazole sulfonic acid)
- » **Bemotrizinol** (Tinosorb S)
- » **Bisotrizole** (Tinosorb M)

Physical blockers are **titanium dioxide** and **zinc oxide**. When applied they leave a thick opaque (white) layer on the skin. Microfine or nanoparticles of both are transparent on the skin and reflect UV radiation.

## 2. Do babies' need a special sunscreen?

- » Babies' skin is very sensitive and can sunburn easily so keep them out of the sun.
- » Once a baby is moving use the five SunSmart steps.



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## 3. What is the SPF on a sunscreen label?

SPF is a measure of how much **UVB** the sunscreen can filter. Currently there is no international standard to label the degree of protection from UVA.

Choose a **broad-spectrum, water-resistant, sunscreen with a SPF of at least 30** and apply this correctly. Higher SPF sunscreens are available, however they still need to be correctly applied and reapplied. When the instructions on the sunscreen label are followed, SPF 30 filters 96.7% of UV radiation. SPF 50 filters 98% of UV radiation. No matter how high the SPF rating, no sunscreen can screen out all UV radiation.

## 4. What is the best way to apply sunscreen?

- » Apply sunscreen **20 minutes** before sun exposure to allow time for it to dry and be absorbed into the skin.

- » An average-sized adult should apply at least 1 teaspoon of sunscreen to each arm and leg, the front of the body and the back of the body, and 1 teaspoon to the face neck and ears (7 teaspoons in total).
- » Always reapply sunscreen every **two hours** when you are outdoors and more often if you are sweating or in water.

### For more information:

#### Cancer Society SunSmart advice:

[www.sunsmart.org.nz/](http://www.sunsmart.org.nz/)

[www.cancer.org.nz/cancer/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart](http://www.cancer.org.nz/cancer/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart)

#### DermNet – sunscreen advice:

[www.dermnetnz.org/topics/how-to-choose-and-use-sunscreen/](http://www.dermnetnz.org/topics/how-to-choose-and-use-sunscreen/)

#### Consumer New Zealand – sunscreen:

[www.consumer.org.nz/search?query=sunscreen+](http://www.consumer.org.nz/search?query=sunscreen+)

**Or talk to your pharmacist or GP if you want to know more about sunscreen or vitamin D**

