Ozone is a natural gas in the upper atmosphere of earth that protects us from the sun’s UV (ultraviolet) radiation. Too much exposure to the UV radiation can cause sunburns, but it can also lead to skin cancer, cataracts of the eye and premature aging of the skin. Because kids spend so much time in the summer sun, unprotected exposure during youth puts children at an increased lifetime risk for skin cancer. It is estimated that over 1 million people in the US are diagnosed with skin cancer each year. Since it is largely preventable, through the use of sunwise practices, protecting ourselves and our kids from the harmful rays is especially important.

Kids and teenagers who are active outdoors – especially those with asthma – are particularly sensitive to ground-level ozone. Ozone can cause coughing, throat irritation and pain when taking a deep breath. It can also trigger asthma attacks the day after ozone levels are high.

Steps to Take:

**Do not burn** – five or more sunburns can double your chance of getting skin cancer

**Watch the UV Levels** – when the index is high, very high or extreme, limit outdoor activities between 10am and 4pm, when the sun is less intense

**Generously Apply Sunscreen** – twenty minutes before going outside apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a SPF of at least 15. Reapply every two hours or after swimming or sweating.

**Wear Hats and Sunglasses** – wide brim hats offer more sun protection and wear sunglasses with 99-100% UV-A and UV-B protection.

**Avoid sun tanning and tanning beds** – up to 90% of the visible skin changes commonly attributed to aging are caused by a lifetime of sun exposure.

**Use extra caution near water, snow and sand** – water, sand and snow reflect the UV rays back at you and you can receive extra exposure.

**Encourage** t-shirts or full length shirts instead of tank tops.

Remember – the UV Index is reported on a scale of 1-11+. The higher the number, the stronger the UV rays reaching the Earth. You can find the UV Index in many places – the weather section of the newspaper, on TV and radio weather reports and also on line at [www.epa.gov/sunwise](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise).

The sun is at its highest in the sky around noon. At this time, the sun’s rays have the least distance to travel through our atmosphere and UVB levels are at their highest. In the early morning and late afternoon, the sun’s rays pass through the atmosphere at an angle and they are weaker. UVB rays are more intense during summer but UVA rays are constant throughout the year.

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