

Dermatologist shares essential tips on how to protect your child's skin from insect bites, scrapes and sunburns

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Jayden Galamgam, MD, pediatric dermatologist at UCLA Health, treats a variety of pediatric skin conditions including atopic dermatitis, acne, rashes, and eczema. He has also recently published on the misuse of the term "hypoallergenic" in ingredients in baby lotions and on the insect repellent ingredient picaridin, which is as safe and effective as DEET.

The research [appears](#) in the journal *Pediatric Dermatology*.

Here is Dr. Galamgam's advice for summer skin safety.

Top tips for insect bite prevention

There are several ways to protect children from [insect bites](#) including avoiding areas with lots of insects, wearing [protective clothing](#), and using [insect repellent](#) on the skin.

DEET is the most common and effective repellent. However, there are some concerns about its use in [young children](#) because of rare reports of brain toxicity. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that DEET-containing repellents with concentrations of 30% or less can be safely used on children if applied properly.

Picaridin is another insect repellent that has been growing in popularity. It works as well as DEET, but it is odorless, non-greasy, and does not damage plastics, leather, spandex, and other synthetic fabrics like DEET can. No [serious side effects](#) have been reported with the use of picaridin.

There are other insect repellents available, such as IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, p-Menthane-3,8-diol, catnip oil, citronella, and 2-undecanone. The best insect repellent is whichever one will be used consistently.

When and how to use insect repellent

Insect repellent can help protect kids from diseases spread by ticks, mosquitoes, and other bugs. It should be applied once a day, and only on exposed skin. Avoid products that combine repellent and [sunscreen](#) as it may decrease effectiveness of the sunscreen.

Keep insect repellent away from eyes, mouth, and open wounds, and avoid swallowing it.

If a child has a reaction to insect repellent, wash the skin with soap and water. If there is any concern about a reaction or if someone swallows repellent, contact Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 for further direction.

Treating minor scrapes and cuts

For minor scrapes or cuts, we recommend gently cleaning the wound with soap and water, applying a barrier of petroleum jelly or healing ointment and then covering the area with a bandage.

In general, there is no need to use antibiotic ointments unless there is a concern about infection. If infection is suspected, consult your health care provider.

Sun safety: Beyond the basics

Daily use of a broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least 30 SPF is the key to preventing [sun damage](#). Being diligent in the summer is especially important. Other recommendations include avoiding [sun exposure](#) in the middle of the day and reducing direct sun exposure by wearing a hat and lightweight clothing.

Mineral sunscreens, which create a barrier on the skin that reflects UV light, are recommended for children but they may leave a visible white residue even when used as directed. Mineral sunscreens can be applied immediately before sun exposure, but chemical sunscreens, which absorb rays, should be applied 15-30 minutes before sun exposure to allow adequate time to bind to the [skin](#). Sunscreen should also be reapplied after prolonged swimming or sweating.

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, the use of sunscreen should be minimized in children younger than 6 months old.

Soothing sunburns

For mild sunburns, you can try cool compresses or soaks, calamine lotion, and aloe vera-based gels to relieve discomfort. If the sunburn is more severe, it's important to contact your doctor for further guidance.

More information: Sasan D. Noveir et al, Prevalence of potential contact allergens in best-selling baby cleansers, *Pediatric Dermatology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/pde.15570](https://doi.org/10.1111/pde.15570)

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