

Child safety - hot weather

Babies and young children should be watched carefully during hot weather. They can quickly lose body fluids through perspiring, which can lead to dehydration. They need to drink regularly, wear light clothing and be kept cool.

Warning signs of dehydration

Dehydration may be a risk if your child:

- Seems tired and lethargic
- Has sunken and dark eyes
- Is irritable or crying
- Has fewer wet nappies than usual
- Has hot and dry skin or looks pale
- Has a dry and coated-looking tongue and mouth
- Has a high temperature
- Vomits or has diarrhoea
- Is not eating or drinking.

If you are worried that your child has one or more of these signs, take your child to a doctor or hospital.

Offer frequent drinks to avoid dehydration

- Breastfeeding – if you are breastfeeding, feed your baby more often. Have plenty of fluids yourself, including a cool drink at every feed.
- Bottle feeding – if you are bottle feeding, offer extra cool, boiled water after each bottle.
- Small children – give young children regular drinks during the day. Water is best.

Keep children cool during hot weather

It is often better to stay indoors on a hot day. If you must go outside:

- Dress your child in light clothing and a well-fitting sun hat.
- Take plenty of drinks for your child.
- Keep in the shade.

If your child is going outdoors, use an SPF 30+ sunscreen on your child's face, hands and any other parts of the body that aren't covered by clothes. Sunscreen works better if you put it on 20 minutes before you go outside, and reapply it every two hours.

Recently, researchers have been looking at whether sunscreens harm babies younger than one year old (most authorities don't recommend sunscreen under the age of six months). They have studied whether a baby's thin skin can absorb chemicals from sunscreen, which might damage the baby's organs.

If you use only small amounts of sunscreen on uncovered areas such as the face and hands, and use clothing to cover most of the body, rather than slathering your baby's legs, arms and body in sunscreen), the tiny amount of sunscreen that might be absorbed shouldn't harm your baby.

Keep children cool when they sleep during hot weather

Your child will sleep more comfortably if you:

- Let them sleep in the coolest room in the house.
- Make sure air can circulate around them – for example, by removing any padding around the cot.
- Don't leave babies to sleep in a pram – they can be hot and airless.
- Hang wet towels over chairs or windows to cool the air.
- Use fans, but not directed at the child.
- Cover mattresses and waterproof sheets with thick layers of cotton sheets to absorb perspiration and prevent prickly heat rash.
- Avoid using a pillow or mattress that your baby sinks down into.
- Put your baby to bed in just a nappy.

Take care in the car during hot weather

If you need to go out in the car in hot weather:

- Try to make trips in the coolest part of the day.
- Keep the windows open while the car is moving or use the air conditioner.
- **Never** leave babies or young children alone in a car, no matter what the weather. Even in mild weather, cars quickly become too hot for small children.
- Use sunshades on windows.

Sick children need special care in hot weather

Sick children need special attention in hot weather. Even minor illnesses, such as colds or gastroenteritis, need special care in hot weather. These illnesses often lead to a slight rise in temperature by themselves but, in hot weather, this could lead to dehydration.

Frequent breastfeeding and extra drinks are very important if your baby is ill. To cool hot little bodies, try frequent lukewarm baths, or sponge your child down with a cool face washer.

Seek help if there is no improvement or if you are worried.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- 24-hour Maternal and Child Health Telephone Service Tel. 13 22 29
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Hospital emergency departments.

Things to remember

- Babies overheat quickly in hot weather.
- Give babies and young children extra drinks in hot weather.
- Dress babies and young children in cool clothing and apply hats and sunscreen.
- Let babies and young children sleep in the coolest room in the house.
- Never leave children in the car.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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