

# OnTrack to Wellness

Brought to You by the NYC Transit HR Benefits Wellness Team

June 2016

## Summer is Here.

Now that days are longer and the temperatures are warmer, it's officially the season to spend time outdoors. The NYC Transit HR Benefits Wellness Team wants to remind you to keep cool and stay safe when you're having fun in the sun.

Besides doing its job to protect all of your internal organs, your skin is the body's largest organ, weighing roughly eight pounds and covering 22 square feet if it were stretched out. The enormity of skin gives us all the more reason to protect it from the sun year-round, but especially in the summer months when the sun is at it strongest. Use the information in this newsletter to learn about how to protect yourself from the sun.

### Facts on the Sun and Your Skin

*From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*

As much as we all enjoy being in the sun, you may not know all the facts about how it affects your skin.

- ✓ When you're outdoors, remember to protect yourself from the sun. The sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause damage to your skin [in as little as 15 minutes](#).
- ✓ If it's cool and cloudy outside, you still have to cover up: UV rays can still damage your skin.
- ✓ When your skin changes color, whether red from sunburn or tanned, [it means it's damaged](#). Any color change indicates that UV rays have damaged it.
- ✓ Everyone is at risk for skin cancer, but some of us have [risk factors that increase the likelihood](#), such as family history of skin cancer or lighter skin tone.
- ✓ [Indoor tanning is not safe](#). Your skin is still exposed to UVA and UVB rays, which cause damage.

While not all skin cancers look the same, [a change in your skin](#) is the most common symptom of skin cancer. This could be a new growth, a sore that doesn't heal, or a change in a mole.

### Sun Safety Tips to Protect Your Skin

Here are some tips from the American Cancer Society to help you protect yourself when out in the sun. Try to incorporate them into your daily life so you can enjoy the summer safely:

- 1. Use sunscreen—and apply it properly:** Use sunscreen that offers broad spectrum (UVA and UVB) protection and has SPF of at least 15, according to the [CDC](#). Make sure your sunscreen isn't expired, and follow label directions when applying. It should be reapplied about every two hours and after swimming, sweating, or toweling off to maintain protection.
- 2. Stay in the shade:** UV exposure may increase your risk for cancer, so try to seek shade when you're outdoors.
- 3. Protect your skin with clothing:** Try to cover as much skin as possible, and wear dark colors—they generally provide more protection than lighter colored clothing.
- 4. Wear a hat and sunglasses:** A hat with a two-to three-inch brim can help to protect your face and ears. UV-blocking sunglasses can help protect your eyes and prevent certain eye diseases.
- 5. Avoid tanning beds and use sunless tanning lotion instead:** Tanning bed use has been linked to an increased risk of melanoma. Still want a tan? Try sunless tanning lotion.

Read more about these tips [here](#), and always protect children from the sun.

Learn more on the next page >>

## Understanding Sunscreen Types

Sunscreen is complex, and not all sunscreens are created equal. It's important to understand the types of sunscreen available and what sun protection factor (SPF) means.



### Physical Sunscreen

Often referred to as “sunblock,” physical sunscreen contains ingredients like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide that provide broad protection against both UVB and UVA light, which can cause sunburn or even skin cancer.



### Chemical Sunscreen

Instead of reflecting light, chemical sunscreens absorb UVB and UVA rays and reduce ultraviolet radiation penetration in the skin.

## What is SPF?

When you pick up a bottle of sunscreen, the first thing you may notice is the SPF, which can range from two all the way up to 100. SPF refers to the sunscreen's ability to block out the sun's rays, and how long you can stay in the sun without burning. It may sound like SPF 2 and SPF 50 offer vastly different levels of protection, but, in reality, they don't. For example, SPF 15 absorbs 93% of the sun's rays, while SPF 34 absorbs 97%. [Learn more about sunscreen.](#)

## Check the Ultraviolet (UV) Index

It's a good idea to check the Ultraviolet (UV) Index so you can plan your sun protection for the day. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Weather Service developed the UV Index to help us understand the amount of UV we're exposed to each day. You can find the UV Index on websites, such as [Coppertone's](#), certain apps like The Weather Channel, and TV weather reports.

As you can see in the chart below, as the UV Index number increases, so does the exposure level. When the exposure level is moderate or higher, greater protection is needed.

UV Index Number	Exposure Level
0 – 2	Minimal
3 – 4	Low
5 – 6	Moderate
7 – 9	High
10+	Very High

Find out more about sun safety on the American Skin Association [website](#).

### Did You Know?

Ever examine your own skin? If not, it might be time to start. Self-exams are critical to early detection. The Skin Cancer Foundation offers [step-by-step instructions](#) on how to do it. And next time you're at your doctor, ask for a skin exam.