Looking On The Sunnyside: Sunscreen Use During Pregnancy

By Robert Felix, President, MotherToBaby

Gardens are blooming, kids are out of school, beaches and parks are crowded, and the sun is shining. Ahhh….Summer is here again! With more skin showing during these warm summer months, it's important to protect our skin from the sun by wearing sunscreen. But what do we know about the safety of sunscreen products during pregnancy? Should pregnant moms avoid sunscreen? What if the day is overcast and cloudy? These are questions I'm getting often these days as a teratogen information specialist at MotherToBaby. So let me share with you what I tell women who contact our service…

First, there's a misunderstanding that when the sun is not directly shining, like when it's overcast, we are protected from the harmful effects of the sun's ultraviolet rays (UV-A and UV-B). So let me shine a light on the issue (no pun intended). Because the sun's ultraviolet rays penetrate clouds, everyone – including children and pregnant women – is vulnerable to sunburns, even on cloudy days. Damage to our skin that is caused by the sun can lead to long-term issues, including premature aging as well as skin cancer.. Prevention is key. Seeking shade, wearing protective clothing and using sunscreen are all important in reducing the risk of sunburns and skin cancer.

So what about sunscreen safety during pregnancy?

Sunscreen alone is not fully protective. However, it certainly can provide added protection for the skin and reduce the risk from sunburn. In fact, the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends everyone use sunscreen. Pregnant or not, choose a sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB rays. Water resistant with a high sun protection factor (SPF) really helps, too; the AAD recommends using a sunscreen with a SPF of at least 30, which blocks 97% of the sun's rays.1

The ingredients in sunscreen products in the U.S. have to go through a specific approval process. They must be reviewed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for their safety before they hit shelves. Unfortunately, there is not one preferred choice for pregnant women. However, it is reassuring that to date there is no published information suggesting that sunscreens cause an effect to the developing fetus/unborn baby. Additionally, sunscreen use can help prevent blistering sunburns, which can become easily infected and lead to other complications for a pregnant woman.

So what do our counselors at MotherToBaby recommend that pregnant women do? Before you head out the door, cover up with cool, breathable long sleeve clothing; wear a hat to protect your head and face; apply sunscreen on any areas of your skin that are exposed; and try to stay under shaded areas, when possible. Our last bit of advice? Enjoy your summer!

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MotherToBaby is a service of the international non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), a suggested resource by many agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Office of Women's Health. If you have questions about medications, diseases, vaccines or other exposures, call MotherToBaby toll-FREE at 866-626-6847 or visit www.MotherToBaby.org to browse a library of fact sheets and to find your nearest affiliate.

References:

- American Academy of Dermatology. Suncreen FAQs. Available from, https://www.aad.org/media-resources/stats-and-facts/prevention-and-care/sunscreen-faqs Accessed July 6, 2015.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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