Screening Your Sunscreen During Pregnancy

As the famous song croons, “Summertime and the living is easy….” Summer is finally here! COVID-19 has interfered with outdoor gatherings, but people are starting to venture out…with good social distancing, of course! Outdoor activities mean more sun exposure, and healthcare providers recommend protecting your skin from the sun. These recommendations stem from concerns that the sun’s UV (ultraviolet) rays can damage the skin and increase the risk for skin cancer and early aging. Studies show that an exposure as short as 15 minutes in duration can cause skin damage.

Sunscreen and Pregnancy

Pregnant women often ask MotherToBaby about whether sunscreen is ok to use during pregnancy. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates sunscreen ingredients to ensure safety and effectiveness. The FDA is currently in the process of updating requirements, so stay tuned for news on that front. The FDA reminds us that, “Given the recognized public health benefits of sunscreen use, Americans should continue to use sunscreen with other sun protective measures as this important rulemaking effort moves forward.”

What’s in Sunscreen?

There are two types of UV rays that cause skin damage: UV-A and UV-B. Sunscreens that protect against both types of rays are called ‘broad spectrum’. There are many different active ingredients in sunscreens sold in the US. Some contain chemicals like oxybenzone, an agent banned in some areas because it is harmful to coral. It used to be thought that because they were applied topically to the skin, sunscreens did not end up in the bloodstream. However, several recent studies have found that there is some absorption of sunscreen chemicals through the skin, although in relatively small amounts. Many of these sunscreen chemicals have not been studied very well in pregnancy, although they are not known to have a negative effect on the pregnancy or baby. Aside from active sunscreen ingredients, many products contain other ingredients such as CBD oil (made from the marijuana plant) that have not been studied well in pregnancy. Read the label! Apply your sunscreen properly and then wash your hands.

Alternatives

One alternative is to use a mineral sunscreen such as titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. These are physical blocking agents and stay on top of the skin. That means they are not absorbed through the skin and may be a good choice. These mineral sunscreens are best applied as a lotion rather than a spray since they may be a hazard when inhaled.

Also, limit your exposure by using a hat and other protective clothing, and not going out in the sun during peak hours (between 10a – 2p).

Our last bit of advice? Enjoy your summer!

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

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