



Much of Scouting occurs outdoors and in the sun. Many Scouts and Scouters get busy going and doing, simply forget to take adequate precautions, and end up with sunburns. Unprotected over-exposure to the sun can result in a number of short-term and possibly long-term effects—many of which can be prevented with some simple actions like sunscreen and appropriate clothing. The three examples below are typical of the many incidents that have been reported to the BSA over the last several years.

Incident Review #1

Members of a Cub Scout day camp staff spent a good part of the middle of the day outside working to set up for field sports and other activities. It was warm, and shirts were removed at some point. They had brought water and had hydrated well, but none of the staff remembered to apply sunscreen, and all three ended up with second-degree sunburns, which are characterized by blistering.

Sunburns can occur on cloudy days. As much as 80 percent of the damaging ultraviolet (UV) sunrays can pass through clouds. Snow, sand, and water can reflect UV rays that can cause damage to your skin and your eyes.

Key Points

- Multiple risks can exist in the same situation. Both sunburn and dehydration risks exist in the bright sun, and failure to address all heat-related risk factors in a situation like this may result in serious harm. In addition to encouraging water consumption, we must also be vigilant in encouraging the application and reapplication of a broad-spectrum (UVA and UVB) sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 in all situations where work in the bright sun must occur.
- Timing of activities in the sun can mitigate a number of issues. Working early in the day or later would have prevented much of their exposure.
- Wearing light clothing will limit the amount of sun exposure. If work (or fun) must occur in the bright sun at midday, consider clothing with a built-in sun protecting factor (SPF) and appropriate hats, along with sunscreen.

Incident Review #2

During a long day of snow sports, several Scouts experienced first- and second-degree sunburns on exposed portions of their faces. The day was intermittently sunny and cloudy, but none considered the reflective properties of the snow, which resulted in the unexpected severe sunburns.

Key Points

- Even with the cold and cloudy conditions, sunburn can occur if sunscreen isn't applied. Though much of the skin may be protected by goggles, helmets, caps, and even balaclavas, any skin that's exposed can burn.
- Rest breaks and lift rides can be used to take a look at your buddy's face and reapply sunscreen. Sunscreens with moisturizers are helpful in limiting burns from the wind and sun.
- Don't forget to protect lips as well. Lip balms with an SPF of 15 or 30 are readily available in drugstores and at the slopes. It's about more than chapped lips—sun exposure on the lips and around the mouth can make the ride home very painful.

When to seek medical attention for a sunburn

- Blisters occur over a large part of your body.
- High fever, chills, headache, or illness are present with the sunburn.
- Sunburn doesn't improve in a few days.



Incident Review #3

Sunburn risks are perhaps the greatest around aquatic activities, including swimming, boating, skiing, and lifeguarding. UV rays reflected from the water contribute to exposure as well as those from direct sunlight. Numerous incidents have been reported of serious sunburns around aquatic activities that are very popular in Scout camps and high-adventure bases.



Key Points

- Lifeguards and swimming instructors can be especially at risk as they focus on managing a safe swim area rather than thinking of personal protection from the sun. They may be without shirts in the sun for prolonged periods and busy moving from one session to the next. The additional effects of the sun reflecting on the water can cause damage to the skin even on cloudy days. Provision of sunscreen and reminders to apply and reapply should be posted and should become as common as calling buddy checks and getting a drink between sessions. Be sure to protect your eyes with sunglasses that protect you from both UVA and UVB rays.
- Boating and sunburned feet can also be a serious issue and especially painful. Frequent application of sunscreen and wearing water shoes are good alternatives to being hobbled by badly burned and painful feet.
- No sunscreens are truly 100 percent waterproof. Follow the label directions and remember that a single application does not protect against sunburn for the entire day on the river or at the pool. Pay close attention to application of sunscreen to areas that are exposed every day, such as the face, ears, and nose. A broad-brimmed hat can also help to reduce the effects of the sun but should be worn in conjunction with sunscreen.

Discussion Questions

- What actions can be taken in your unit or camp that can prevent extreme sun exposure?
- Do you provide or encourage the use of sunscreen in your unit?
- When would medical care be required for serious sunburn?
- How can you communicate the importance of prevention with your Scouts/Scouters?
- Do you model good behavior such as the use of sunscreen, avoidance of noontime sun, etc.?
- How can you add the use of or reapplication of sunscreen to the same routines for encouraging hydration?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists these risk factors for sunburn:

- High elevation
- Midday exposure from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are the strongest
- Summer months
- Reflection from snow, sand, and water
- Locations closer to the equator
- Reactions to some medications

Resources

- American Academy of Dermatology—“Prevent skin cancer,” www.aad.org/public/kids/skin/skin-cancer/how-to-prevent-skin-cancer
- Mayo Clinic—“Sunburn,” www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/sunburn/symptoms-causes/syc-20355922
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—“What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk of Skin Cancer,” www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/prevention.htm
- American Academy of Pediatrics—“Sunburn: Treatment and Prevention,” healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/skin/Pages/Sunburn-Treatment-and-Prevention.aspx

“Most sun damage occurs in childhood.”
— Source: American Academy of Pediatrics