



**May 24, 2017**

**Q.** Is it safe to use sunscreens while pregnant?

**A.** The proven benefit of sunscreen outweighs any potential risks.

Concern has arisen over an ingredient in some sunscreens called retinyl palmitate. It is an inactive ingredient, a type of topical vitamin A. In skin it converts readily to retinoids which are associated with a risk of birth defects in people taking oral acne medications containing them. However, the animal studies which showed birth defects used much higher doses than can be absorbed through the skin. Studies on rats have not shown sunscreen to cause malformations.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that pregnant women protect their skin from the sun by wearing sunscreen with SPF ( sun protection factor ) of 15 or more. Sun exposure will darken dark brown areas around the eyes, nose and cheeks called cholasma or “mask of pregnancy” which some women develop ( about 70% ) during pregnancy. Sun screen and wearing a wide brim hat can prevent these areas from getting darker.

Here are other steps that Health Canada recommends you take to protect against UV exposure:

- If possible, avoid being in the sun between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.
- Look for shade, stay under a tree, or use an umbrella.
- During outdoor activities, wear sunglasses to protect your eyes. When the UV index is three or higher, you should also wear protective clothing and a large-brimmed hat.

Topical absorption of sunscreen is minimal. Sunscreen is safe and recommended for use during pregnancy.

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## **Sources**

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2. CBC News. Sunscreen benefits beat risks in pregnancy: MDs. Posted: May25,2011.  
[www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2011/05/25/sunscreen-pregnancy.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2011/05/25/sunscreen-pregnancy.html)
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