

# Sunscreen chemicals may be harmful to kids

BY JULIE DEARDORFF  
CHICAGO TRIBUNE & MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

Sunscreen can help prevent those painful episodes of childhood sunburn, a risk factor for skin cancer later in life. But although sunscreen is recommended for infants older than 6 months by everyone from the National Institutes of **Health** to the American Academy of Pediatrics, there's growing concern by advocacy groups, parents and some doctors that some of the chemicals in the products are endocrine disruptors and may pose risks to children.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which drafted sunscreen safety standards in 1978, is expected to issue the final rules in October. But for the past three decades, "it has been a Wild West on the market," said Jane Houlihan, senior vice president of research for the advocacy group Environmental Working Group (ewg.org). "**Parents** need to be careful what they're using."

EWG, which plans to release its third annual sunscreen safety report Tuesday, recommends against using any product containing the ingredient oxybenzone. Though oxybenzone is one of more than a dozen ingredients approved by the FDA, "we know it's absorbed significantly into the body," said Dr. Alan Greene, the author of "Raising Baby Green: The Earth-Friendly Guide to Pregnancy, Childbirth and Baby Care" (Jossey-Bass, \$16.95).

What concerns Greene is that the tests evaluating oxybenzone have been done on **healthy** adults in the middle of life. "We don't know the impact of kids and babies who get at least three times the concentration as adults," he said.

But the data are preliminary. Moreover, "absorption alone isn't enough to justify any posture," said Dr. Michael Smith, director of pediatric dermatology at **Children's** Hospital at Vanderbilt University.

"We are very comfortable with zinc oxide and titanium dioxide agents," said Smith, chair of the AAP section on dermatology. He added that he's unaware of compelling data showing that parents need to be concerned about any ingredients in current FDA-approved sunscreens, including oxybenzone.

Still, zinc and titanium products have their own issues: They may contain nanoparticles that have limited safety **studies**, may be dangerous if inhaled and may pose a risk to the environment. The FDA doesn't require the manufacturer to list nanoparticles on the label.

The EWG calls nano-scale zinc and titanium "a reasonable choice" in sunscreens.

A version of this story appears on page 4D of the Sunday, May 23, 2010, print edition of the Detroit Free Press.

## RELATED INFORMATION SUNSCREEN TIPS

- Look for zinc oxide- and titanium dioxide-based sunscreens that do not contain nanoparticles. They are generally thicker and whiter than those with nanoparticles.
- Avoid nano-sprays or powders altogether, especially near the face, because the particles can be inhaled, said Dr. Alan Greene, author of "Raising Baby Green."
- Once your baby is 6 months old, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends products with a rating of SPF 30 or more with a broad-spectrum sunscreen, or one that protects against both ultraviolet A and B rays.
- "Avoid products that combine bug repellent and sunscreen," said Dr. Michael Smith of Vanderbilt University. Bug repellent isn't known to be safe for frequent application -- but you do need to reapply sunscreen often to avoid sunburn.
- Be sure to use enough sunscreen: 3 teaspoons for an average toddler, 6 teaspoons for an 8-year-old, Smith said.