

MEDIA RELEASE

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DON'T LET THE 'FACTOR' FACTOR CATCH YOU OUT THIS SUMMER

NHS North Somerset is appealing to sun lovers to err on the side of caution when buying and applying suntan lotion this summer. With so much confusion currently surrounding advice on the correct SPF factor to use, many sun lovers may purchase a product offering too little protection, says MHS North Somerset Director of Public Health Becky Pollard,

She is also warning sun lovers against digging out last year's sun tan lotion as it may have lost its protective properties over the winter period,. She explained: "Sun tan lotions have a 'use by' date which should not be ignored. But even using a brand new lotion, it is all too easy to become sunburned, particularly in seaside locations like Weston super Mare, where cooling sea breezes can disguise the fact that you are burning, until it is too late. "

She added: "We have not yet had a chance to acclimatise to very strong sunshine and the amount of ultra violet light from the sun that reaches the earth can be particularly high at this time of year when the ozone layer is thinner. All this can add up to a painful dose of sunburn. Children are particularly vulnerable and parents need to be extra vigilant whether they are enjoying the sun in the UK or abroad".

Forecasts are promising some fantastic early summer weather over the coming weeks, but while the sun can be fun, it can also be dangerous. Sun exposure is the main cause of skin cancer, and the disease can occur years after an episode of sun burning, It can also affect young people. Malignant melanoma, the most severe skin cancer is now the most common cancer in young adults - aged 15 to 34 - in the UK.

Added Becky Pollard “I it’s very important to take care in the sun and to always use sunscreen. Effective sun protection such as clothes, hats and sunglasses are a common recommendation, but the ‘factor’ factor is very confusing and to be on the safe side I urge people to take care and use a high protection factor sun cream, **at least** SPF15. Sunscreen only works if you use enough. It should be applied thickly, evenly, and regularly to ensure that your skin is protected from the sun.”

Other tips for using sunscreen properly

- Apply plenty of sunscreen and reapply it regularly. Sunscreen can be easily washed,
- Rubbed or sweated off
- Apply it to clean, dry skin
- Even sunscreens that claim to be ‘waterproof’ should be reapplied after going in the water.
- Use sunscreen together with shade and clothing to avoiding getting caught out by sunburn.
- Don’t be tempted to spend longer in the sun than you would without sunscreen.
- Do not store sunscreens in very hot places as extreme heat can ruin their protective chemicals.

- Don't forget to check the expiry date on your sunscreen. Most sunscreens have a shelf life of 2-3 years but ensure your sunscreen has not expired before you use it.
- Buy and apply a sunscreen with SPF 15 or above –. We also recommend using a sunscreen that is 'broad spectrum', meaning that it offers protection against UVA and UVB.
- An SPF15 sunscreen filters out 93% of UVB radiation, while an SPF30 sunscreen filters out 96%. It is a common misconception that SPF30 offers double the protection of SPF15.

No sunscreen, no matter how high the factor, can provide 100% protection. And no sunscreen, whether it's factor 15 or 50, will provide the protection it claims unless it is applied properly. It is impossible to compensate for too thin a layer by increasing the factor you use. Therefore, it is crucial that you **apply sunscreen generously and regularly.**

Added Becky Pollard: "Research has shown that people apply much less sunscreen than they need to. At the amounts that most people use, they're only getting about as much protection as an SPF3 sunscreen, even if they have bought an SPF80 bottle. Using a higher factor will never compensate for not putting enough on. And, worryingly, many people burn more frequently when they use higher factors of sunscreen because they stay out in the sun for longer. There is a concern that higher factor sunscreens may lure people into a false sense of security. The after effects of sunburn are painful, unpleasant and can leave you with lasting skin damage."

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

- NHS North Somerset is the local Primary Care Trust for North Somerset. The trust was established in April 2002 to ensure the provision of the highest quality healthcare services to the residents of North Somerset. It was recently assessed as one of the most improved PCTs in England by the Care Quality Commission.

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