

FDA warns: Protect babies, kids from the sun



**Bill
Moak**

CONSUMER WATCH

In the past few years, I've had the opportunity to visit Ukraine on numerous occasions to support the work of local churches. Most who visit Ukraine find it's a vast, beautiful and hospitable country, with its Delta-rich soil and generous people.

During one July outing in which we were helping a local church hold a vacation Bible school, we conducted several activities outside. It was summer and a bit hot (just like an average late-

spring day for any Mississippi native, but practically a heat wave for the locals).

I thought it was curious that most of the kids wouldn't emerge from the shade of the trees to take part in activities in the bright sunshine. When I asked a translator, he told me that it's because Ukrainian parents don't believe it's healthy for their kids get a lot of direct sun, so they train them to avoid sun exposure as much as possible. Internationally, this attitude is becoming more and more common, as many countries deal with high levels of UV radiation and awareness of skin cancer risk is growing.

Maybe they have a point. We know exposure to some direct sunlight is beneficial to a point, and helps the body

produce essential vitamins, as well as having a number of other proven health benefits. But being out in the sun for extended periods also carries its own risks in the form of sun-damaged skin, skin cancer and eye problems. While the use of sunscreens and protective clothing has been shown to reduce the skin's vulnerability to harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation, many health experts say it's best to limit our exposure. And that goes double for smaller children.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently issued some new guidelines for sun exposure in younger kids, recommending that infants under 6 months old avoid sun exposure entirely. "The best approach is to keep infants under 6 months out of the sun," noted FDA pediatrician Hari Cheryl Sachs,

"and to particularly avoid exposure to the sun in the hours between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when ultraviolet rays are most intense."

That may come as a shock to some parents, many of whom grew up in the sun. Sachs explained that, although sunscreens are fine for older kids and adults, babies' skin (since it covers less surface area and is less mature) is likely to absorb the numerous chemicals contained in most sunscreen products, with unknown possible side effects.

In addition, she adds, babies can overheat faster than older kids and adults, and can become dehydrated more easily.

"The best protection is to keep your

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