
Hot weather and child safety

Summary

- Give babies and young children extra drinks in hot weather.
 - Never leave children in the car.
 - Babies overheat quickly in hot weather.
 - Dress babies and young children in cool clothing and apply hats and sunscreen.
 - Let babies and young children sleep in the coolest room in the house.
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Watch babies and young children carefully during hot weather. They can quickly lose body fluids through perspiring, which can lead to dehydration. They need to drink regularly, wear light clothing and be kept cool.

Keeping children hydrated in hot weather

On hot days, make sure you offer your child frequent drinks to avoid dehydration.

If you are breastfeeding, feed your baby as often as they need during hot weather. This may be more often than usual. Have plenty of fluids yourself, including a cool drink at every feed. The Australian Breastfeeding Association has more information about **[breastfeeding and keeping baby cool in the heat](#)**.

If you are bottle feeding you may also need to increase the number of feeds.

Babies who are more than six months old can be offered small amounts of cooled boiled water, after or between feeds. Give young children regular drinks during the day. Water is best. Aim for children to drink about 1 to 1.5 L (1 to 6 glasses) per day.

Dehydration in children

Young children can easily become dehydrated during periods of hot weather due to sweating, and not drinking enough water.

Dehydration can also be caused by:

- doing lots of physical activity or exercise
- having a high temperature
- severe vomiting or diarrhoea
- not eating or drinking enough.

Your child may be mildly dehydrated if they:

- are dizzy or lightheaded
- feel nauseous or have a headache
- have dark yellow or brown urine
- have fewer wet nappies than usual, or if their nappies are less wet than usual
- if they go to the toilet less often
- have a dry and coated-looking tongue and mouth.

If your child shows these signs, the best treatment is to give them some water or an oral rehydration solution (such as Gastrolyte or Pedialyte). If they refuse either of these, try diluted apple juice or their usual milk. Don't give sugary drinks such as lemonade or sports drinks as this can make dehydration worse.

Your child may be severely dehydrated if they:

- are extremely thirsty
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- seem tired and lethargic
- look pale and have sunken and dark eyes
- have fewer tears than usual when crying
- are irritable, drowsy or confused
- are breathing faster than usual and have a fast heart rate (pulse).

If your child shows signs of severe dehydration, see your GP or go to your closest hospital emergency department.

Never leave babies or children in cars

On a hot day or any other day, **never leave your baby or child in a car** – even with the air conditioning on. Leaving a baby or child in the car, even for a short time, puts them at high risk of heatstroke, dehydration or death, particularly in summer.

Did you know:

- **The temperature inside a parked car can very quickly climb to dangerous levels**. It can double in just five minutes – so on a 30-degree day, the temperature inside a car can reach a scorching 60 degrees very quickly.
- Large cars heat up just as fast as smaller ones, and leaving the windows down slightly has little effect on the inside temperature.
- Most of the temperature rise happens in the first five minutes after closing the car – the time it takes to run in and out of the shop that you're popping into.
- A child's body temperature rises three to five times faster than an adult's – making the impact of heat on their small bodies almost immediate.
- It's against the law for a person responsible for a baby or child to leave the child alone without someone to look after them. This includes leaving a child at home, or in a car, or anywhere else unattended.

Avoid fatal distraction

Stress, fatigue, distraction or a change in routine can affect your short-term memory. **This has sometimes led to children being accidentally left in a car**, with tragic outcomes. This is known as fatal distraction.

To lower the risk of accidentally leaving your child in the car, create yourself a safer routine:

- open the back door of the car every time you park, even if there is no one in the back seat
- place a child's bag or cuddly toy in the front seat as a reminder
- leave a bag, phone or wallet in the back seat of the car
- use a mirror for rear facing car seats
- create a mental list of things to check each time you leave the car, for example, 'baby, keys, wallet and phone'.

Keeping children cool when sleeping in hot weather

Your child will sleep more comfortably during periods of hot weather if you:

- Let them sleep in the coolest room in the house.
- Make sure air can circulate around them – for example, by removing any padding around the cot.
- Hang wet towels over chairs or windows in their room to cool the air.
- Use fans, but not directed at the child.
- Cover mattresses and waterproof sheets with thick layers of cotton sheets to absorb perspiration and prevent prickly heat rash.
- Avoid using a pillow or mattress that your baby sinks down into.
- Put your baby to bed in just a nappy.

Don't leave babies to sleep in a pram – they can be hot and airless.

Sick children need special care in hot weather

Sick children need special attention in hot weather. Even minor illnesses, such as colds or gastroenteritis, need special care in hot weather. These illnesses often lead to a slight rise in temperature by themselves but, in hot weather, this could lead to dehydration.

Frequent breastfeeding and extra drinks are very important if your baby is ill. To cool hot little bodies, try frequent lukewarm baths, or sponge your child down with a cool face washer.

Seek help if there is no improvement or if you are worried.

Sun safety for children

Too much exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause sunburn, skin and eye damage, and increase your child's risk of developing skin cancer later in life. (Too little UV can lead to low vitamin D levels, which can affect your child's bones, muscles and overall health.)

The answer is to use the five SunSmart steps whenever UV levels reach 3 or higher. Remember, it's not just about hot, sunny days. UV can be damaging on cool, cloudy days too.

1. **Slip on covering clothing.** Use loose-fitting clothing that covers as much of your child's skin as possible.
2. **Slop on SPF30 (or higher) broad spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen** to any part of their skin not covered by clothing. Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside and reapply every two hours. (Note: The widespread use of sunscreen on babies under six months is not recommended. It is better to keep your baby out of direct sunlight when the UV index is 3 or higher. If using sunscreen on babies, do so very occasionally, on very small areas of skin, and use a baby, toddler or sensitive skin formula.)
3. **Slap on a broad-brimmed hat** that shades the face, neck and ears. Caps do not provide enough protection and are not recommended.
4. **Seek shade.** Remember some UV rays can still reach you in the shade, so continue to use all forms of sun protection.
5. **Slide on wrap-around sunglasses.** Make sure they are labelled AS 1067 so you know they have very good UV protection. Toy sunglasses do not protect the eyes are not recommended. Some retailers sell baby sunglasses with a soft band that holds them in place on baby's head; always supervise your baby to ensure they don't pose a strangulation hazard.

Sun protection is for everyone. As a parent or carer, following the **SunSmart** steps yourself means you are role modelling SunSmart behaviour and staying safe at the same time.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Maternal and Child Health Line** Tel. **13 22 29**
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** Tel. **1300 60 60 24** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Your nearest hospital emergency department

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