

Sunscreen Fast Facts



HOW DOES SUNSCREEN WORK?

- Sunscreen absorbs or reflects some of the sun's UV radiation (rays) that reach our skin's surface.
- No sunscreen provides 100% protection from UV radiation, however, a sunscreen with SPF30 will protect you from around 96.7% of UVB rays and a SPF50 will protect you from around 98% of UVB rays
- Sunscreen protects against two types of UV radiation from the sun, which are different but can both cause skin damage and skin cancer:
 - **UVA** radiation goes deep into the skin, and can cause long-term damage and ageing.
 - **UVB** radiation gets into the top layer of skin, and can cause sunburn.
- Sunscreen doesn't block UV radiation; it filters UV radiation. No matter how high a sunscreen's SPF is, some of the sun's UV radiation can reach our skin.
- Sunscreen is just one part of staying safe in the sun. Wearing a hat, sunglasses and protective clothing, seeking shade and staying hydrated are all important for overall sun safety.

HOW IS SUNSCREEN MADE?

The process that brands must follow to create a sunscreen that meets the strict quality standards required is very robust and includes many rounds of formulation, testing in the lab and on human volunteers and finally independent testing in external labs taking place before SPF, Broad Spectrum and Water Resistance claims are confirmed and included on product labels.

WHAT DO ALL THESE WORDS AND TERMS ON SUNSCREEN LABELS MEAN?

- **SPF:** Sun Protection Factor. The SPF of a sunscreen is a measure of how well it protects the skin from sunburn by UVB rays. Sunscreens need to be applied liberally to achieve the SPF protection claimed on the label.
- **Broad Spectrum:** protection against UVA and UVB rays by providing a barrier that absorbs or reflects UV radiation before it can reach the skin.
- **Dermatologically-tested:** This term indicates that the product has been tested on skin, carried out with voluntary test subjects.
- **Physical Sunscreen:** where a product contains active ingredients such as zinc oxide and titanium dioxide which work by primarily deflecting the sun's rays from your skin.
- **Sensitive:** a product designed for sensitive skin. Often free from fragrance, oils, PABA, or active ingredients which may irritate sensitive skin.
- **The (+) sign:** the plus sign means 'more than'. For example, SPF50+ sunscreen must provide at least SPF60 in testing.
- **Water resistance:** products that have been tested and shown to deliver their labelled SPF after immersion in water.

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HOW IS SUNSCREEN SUPPOSED TO BE USED TO GET THE MAXIMUM PROTECTION ON THE LABELING?

- Use daily whenever the UV Index is 3 or higher.
- Apply generously to all exposed areas of your body at least 20 minutes before going out into the sun.
- A good rule of thumb is to use one teaspoon of sunscreen for each area of your body - arms, legs, front, back, neck and face
- Reapply every two hours or more often if you are swimming, sweating or toweling off.
- A higher SPF sunscreen does not mean you can apply less often. You still need to apply your sunscreen correctly, and reapply at regular intervals to prevent sunburn.
- Store your sunscreen in a cool dark place
- Use before expiry date.

WHAT DO I NEED TO LOOK FOR ON A SUNSCREEN LABEL?

- SPF30 or higher - will give you the best protection from the sun
- Broad Spectrum - will give you protection from UVA and UVB
- Water resistant - if you plan to be spending a lot of time in the water
- products that have been tested and shown to deliver their labelled SPF after immersion in water
- Expiry date - all sunscreens show an expiry date
- States it meets the joint standard AS/NZS 2604

IS SUNSCREEN REGULATED IN NEW ZEALAND?

Yes. In New Zealand any SPF claim is already regulated by the Fair Trading Act and the Cosmetics Group Standard, however New Zealand does not currently have a mandatory Sunscreen Standard.

Most major brands are sold in New Zealand and Australia and therefore already meet the AS/NZS 2604 Standard which is enforced by the Therapeutic Goods Association in Australia. Most New Zealand based brands also already comply with this Standard.

The testing for the AS/NZS 2604 Standard spans SPF claims, broad spectrum claims and water resistance.

Some sunscreens meet other international Standards for other regions too.