



# Why Sunscreen May Not Completely Protect You From Skin Cancer

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By Marrecca Fiore **FOX NEWS**

Do you think lathering on the sunscreen before you hit the beach will keep you safe from skin cancer?

Think again.

Putting on SPF 30 sunscreen before heading out for a day in the sun won't fully protect you against skin cancer if it doesn't contain at least one of three key ingredients that filter out ultraviolet A rays: zinc oxide, titanium dioxide or ecamsule, sold under the brand name Mexoryl.

But finding a product with one of these ingredients can be easier said than done.

"I think that sunscreens do a good job at protecting against skin cancer," said Dr. Ariel Ostad, a New York City dermatologist and skin cancer surgeon. "The problem is that there are only a handful of them that block UVA rays."

There are two types of ultraviolet rays, UVA and UVB, emitted by the sun that are linked to premature aging and skin cancer. UVB rays cause sunburns, while UVA rays cause the skin to tan.

Many people believe they are safe from sun damage and skin cancer if they tan and do not burn. But this is not true, according to doctors and other skin specialists.

"Many sunscreens have misleading claims," said Jane Houlihan, vice president of research for the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit, Washington D.C.-based organization that rates sunscreens and other skin products on their effectiveness.

"There are a million cases of skin cancer in this country every year," she continued.

"And getting burned is only part of the problem. The real problem is that there are no federal standards for what is safe and what is effective when it comes to sunscreens."

The Environmental Working Group released a study earlier this month that found that many sunscreens do not protect against UVA rays. Of 952 sunscreens reviewed, just 142 — 15 percent — provided UVA coverage.

The study was based on a review of hundreds of scientific studies, industry models of sunscreen efficacy, and toxicity and regulatory information housed in almost 60 government, academic and industry databases, according to the [group's Web site](#).

The study recommends the best sunscreens to protect against both types of ultraviolet rays.

[Click here to see the complete study.](#)

Last summer, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration deemed the SPF (sun protection factor) rating system to be antiquated and proposed a four-star rating system for sunscreens and suntan lotions. Under the new system, the FDA would require sunscreen makers to rate protection against both UVB and UVA rays.

The FDA proposal also would require sunscreen makers to perform two tests — a human skin test and a lab test with a sun simulator — on their products.

But plans to make the rating system a requirement are on hold while the FDA reviews the more than 20,000 comments it received on the proposal.

"It's really par for the course as far as the FDA goes," Houlihan said. "They've gone through multiple drafts and multiple delays since they first proposed the regulations 30 years ago."

In the meantime, consumers should make sure they use a sunscreen that contains either zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, or the less frequently used Mexoryl. The sunscreen should also have an SPF of 30, Ostad said.

"Anything above a 30 is unnecessary," he said. "With a 30 or above, you're blocking 99 percent of the rays. Still some of the rays can get through. You have to protect yourself all over: your ears, head and back of the neck. If you're going to be outdoors for long periods, wear a wide-brim hat and use proper sunscreen."

Ostad said consumers should reapply sunscreen throughout the day because the chemicals break down every few hours.

"The key is to also have at least one annual exam" for skin cancer, he said. "If you have a lot of moles, more than 50, you should get every checked every six months. Early detection leads to a cure. You should also do a self-monitoring of your skin and see if there are [any moles] that are changing or any lesion that's not healing or keeps scabbing and bleeding. That could be potential skin cancer."