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Can I Buy the Cheap Sunscreen?

Every parent has stood in the drugstore for way too long debating whether to buy a pricy or cheap bottle of sunscreen for their little ones. But does cost matter when it comes to quality? Not really.

Research conducted by Consumer Reports substantiates it. When experts tested 20 popular sunscreens in 2014 to see if they delivered the SPF protection as promised on the label, along with water resistance, most fell short. For the seven sunscreens that Consumer Reports recommended, all were under \$12, including Coppertone Water Babies SPF 50 (\$11) and Target's Up & Up Sport SPF 50 (\$8). (Some popular sunscreens geared toward children can cost \$20 for just 3 oz.)

"There's no reason you have to spend a lot of money on sunscreen," Jennifer Stein, MD, PhD, assistant professor in the Ronald O. Perelman department of dermatology at NYU Langone Medical Center, tells Yahoo Parenting. "It's not necessarily better than less expensive sunscreen."

Rebecca Baxt, a dermatologist with practices in New York City and New Jersey and a member of the Skin Cancer Foundation, agrees: "The price does not matter," Baxt tells Yahoo Parenting. "What matters are the ingredients. You need to flip to the back and look at the active ingredients. The ones that are the safest

are titanium dioxide and zinc oxide — the white, creamy, pasty sunscreens. They're FDA approved."

Also, look for sunscreen with broad-spectrum protection, which guards against both UVA and UVB rays, and an SPF of 30 or higher, recommends **Baxt**.

It's also worth noting that you don't have to buy designated kids' sunscreen for your children. A Consumer Reports [survey](#) found that of the 30 percent of people who buy kids' sunscreen, about half of them assumed that it was "safer" and "gentler" than adult sunblock. But according to Consumer Reports, "the FDA doesn't make a distinction between kids' sunscreen and others, or hold it to a higher safety standard.

Manufacturers use the same active ingredients, sometimes in the same concentrations, in both types." However, Consumer Reports notes that children's sunscreen may be formulated to be tear-free or sting-free, which is helpful when applying it on your little ones' faces.

To make the most out of whichever sunscreen you choose, here are some tips:

Slather on sunscreen evenly: Titanium dioxide and zinc oxide sit on top of the skin like a UV shield, but they only protect the areas they cover. "Their main goal is to scatter UV light, so it has to be applied evenly onto skin," cosmetic chemist [Ni'Kita Wilson](#) tells Yahoo Health. "Think of a pinball in a pinball machine that keeps getting blocked — that's how the UV rays are blocked by titanium dioxide and zinc oxide when they hit the skin." Go back and forth over the skin to make sure you haven't missed a spot.

Reapply, reapply, reapply: No matter how safe, effective, or affordable a sunscreen is, it won't do your kids any good if you don't reapply. Most experts recommend applying a second coat every two hours, but **Baxt** suggests doing it more often. "It doesn't matter if it says 'water resistant up to 80 minutes,'" she says. "If you're in the water, reapply every hour, and if you're not in the water, reapply every 2 hours."

Buy the lotion instead of the spray: "The spray sunscreen, which everyone loves to use, does not work as well," says **Baxt**. "They're alcohol-based so they dissolve easier in the water and people don't apply them properly. It's very easy to miss a spot with

sprays, so it's easy to get burned." The spray may also irritate children's airways, so avoid spraying their faces. You can also spray the sunscreen into your hands first, and then apply it to your kids.

Don't rely on sunscreen alone for protection: "Sunscreen is just one piece of your sun protection plan," says Stein. "There are other important steps to protecting your kids from sun damage, such as avoiding midday sun and sitting in the shade, especially if you have a little baby, and wearing sun protective clothing, including a hat and sunglasses." Stein also notes that the more sun-protective clothing your child wears, the less sunscreen you have to apply—and reapply—on your child.