

# Parents accused of ignoring sunburn risk to children

**Chris Smyth**

Parents are putting their children at risk of cancer by letting them get a tan, NHS chiefs have warned.

Too many people are “worryingly relaxed” about sunburn and do not realise that browning of the skin is a sign of damage, NHS England has said.

Sunburn in childhood increases the risk of skin cancer in later life and parents are being urged to be more careful after a poll found that a quarter had encouraged their children to get a

tan. A fifth of parents waited until their child was starting to burn before applying sunscreen, according to the survey of 1,001 people with children under the age of 11 by Opinium Research. One in 14 parents had never put sunscreen on their children and the same proportion encouraged children to use a sunbed.

“It’s important that parents take extra care to protect their babies and children,” Nigel Acheson, regional medical director of NHS England, said. “Their skin is much more sensitive than adult skin and damage caused by re-

peated exposure to UV could lead to skin cancer developing in later life.”

A third of parents in the survey thought that a tan was a sign of health and almost half wrongly believed that it was possible to feel the strength of the UV rays that harm the skin.

Clare Nasir, a meteorologist at the Met Office, which commissioned the poll, said that the findings were “really worrying”, adding: “Young children can’t be expected to apply their own sunscreen. They are unlikely to do it thoroughly or will forgo it completely. Pro-

tecting against skin cancer isn’t something parents should leave to chance.”

Nina Goad, of the British Association of Dermatologists, said: “With so many mixed messages about the benefits and risks of sunshine, you can see how parents can become confused.

“While some sunshine is good for children’s bone health, a tan is emphatically not a sign of good health. Your skin is producing additional pigment as a result of too much sun exposure to protect against future damage, so by the time skin has tanned it is damaged.”