

# Keep our kids sunscreen safe

## Sunscreen expert answers four common questions

**A** visit to the sunscreen aisle can be a daunting experience. We want to choose the best product, but what about all those terms, numbers and warnings? We asked sunscreen expert, Nicole Paraszczuk, a personal care and cosmetic product chemist from Harriman for the latest on keeping our kids sunburn free this summer.

### Understand the terms

■ **SPF (sun protection factor):** “The Sun Protection Factor of a sunscreen is really an indicator of how long the sunscreen will remain effective, not how strong the sunscreen is,” Paraszczuk explains. The SPF number itself does not indicate the amount of sunscreen that will remain effective. The SPF number is basically a constant equivalent to the amount of time it takes for your individual skin to show signs of reddening or sunburn when left unprotected.

The mathematical equation involved in order to determine the best SPF number for you is: if it takes 10 minutes for your skin to burn with the addition of SPF 15 you will have protection for 150 minutes (10 x 15) of protection with the applied sunscreen. It is best to assume a child’s skin will burn quickly so calculate on the low side to begin with. If the skin is red, it is too late.

There are also some cautions and misconceptions

regarding sunscreens, Paraszczuk says. “The common desire is to have the highest SPF number possible, but there is not much adequate data to demonstrate that SPF 100 functions any better than an SPF 50. Although it may provide additional protection, it may not be proven. In the end, the same SPF value may not provide the same protection for everyone... it is based on one’s individual skin.”

■ **Broad spectrum:** Parents should look for the term “broad spectrum,” which means the

sunscreen has been tested to protect not only against UVB radiation (sunburn causing), but also protects against UVA radiation (which penetrates more deeply into the skin). If a sunscreen only has an SPF rating, but does not state “broad spectrum,” the sunscreen will only provide UVB protection.

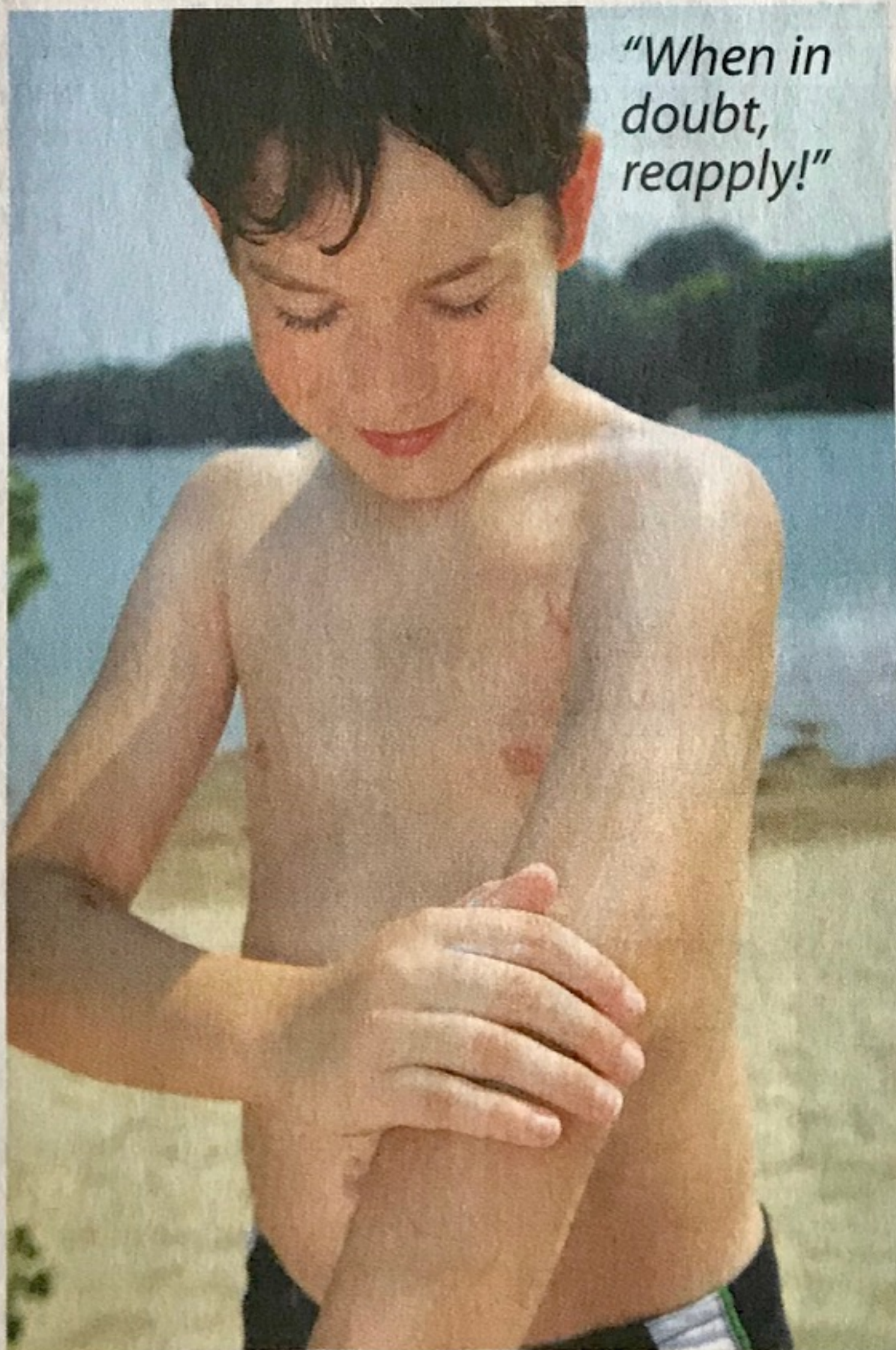
On “broad spectrum” sunscreens, higher SPF values mean more UVB and UVA protection and both are considered to be cancer-causing so protection against both is best.”

■ **Waterproof vs. water resistant:** Sunscreens can no longer make a “waterproof” claim but can now make “water resistant” claims based on a certain criteria of testing after swimming and sweating, says Paraszczuk. “But again,” she says, “SPF is an indication of how long your sun protection will last, not the strength, so when in doubt, reapply!”

### List of ingredients

The long and complicated list of ingredients can give any parent a headache, in fact, says Paraszczuk, “not many people outside of the field are sure what they are reading.”

Parents will see that sunscreen products feature the terms, “organic,” “inorganic,” and a combination of both called “hybrid.” These have more



“When in doubt, reapply!”

(Continued on Page 24)

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## SUNSCREEN PRIMER

(Continued from Page 23)

to do with how the sunscreens work and the ingredients that reflect the UV radiation off the skin, not about whether the product is "natural" or "better" in any sense. Both ways work well and there isn't one hybrid that is proven better than another.

### What about generics?

Money is no object when it comes to protecting our children. However, when comparing brand names to generics, there are generally no differences if the ingredients are the same. "Generic sunscreens," says Paraszczuk, "will impart the same mechanisms as long as they contain the key active ingredients. The consumer has a choice of many different dosage forms out there. Current accepted dosage forms such as oils, creams, lotions, gels, butters, sticks, and sprays are considered useful and effective no matter what the brand."

### Should it be used all year?

"It is recommended that sunscreen be used year round. Usually a minimum of SPF 15 is

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quickly..."*

**NICOLE PARASZCZUK**

personal care & cosmetic product chemist



recommended. This is suggested because although the sun's rays are weaker during the winter months, we are still exposed to the sun's radiation year round," says Paraszczuk.

Shawn Miller-Austin, mother of six sons and living in the Goshen area continues to ensure her two youngest Kenny Coote-Golston, 11 and Christopher Bell, 8, use

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sunscreen when spending extended time in the sun. "While Kenny has fairer skin than Christopher," says Miller-Austin, "it is important to protect their skin from the harmful and damaging rays of the sun. When I choose sunscreens, I usually buy a sunscreen with an SPF60 and shop name brand. Christopher has sensitive skin so I have to buy non-allergenic and fragrance free, so it's usually Aveeno or Neutrogena. I get my information from reading the medical journals, consumer reports and recommendations from the pediatrician."

*Sharon MacGregor is a freelance writer and columnist living in the Bloomingburg area with her husband and two sons.*

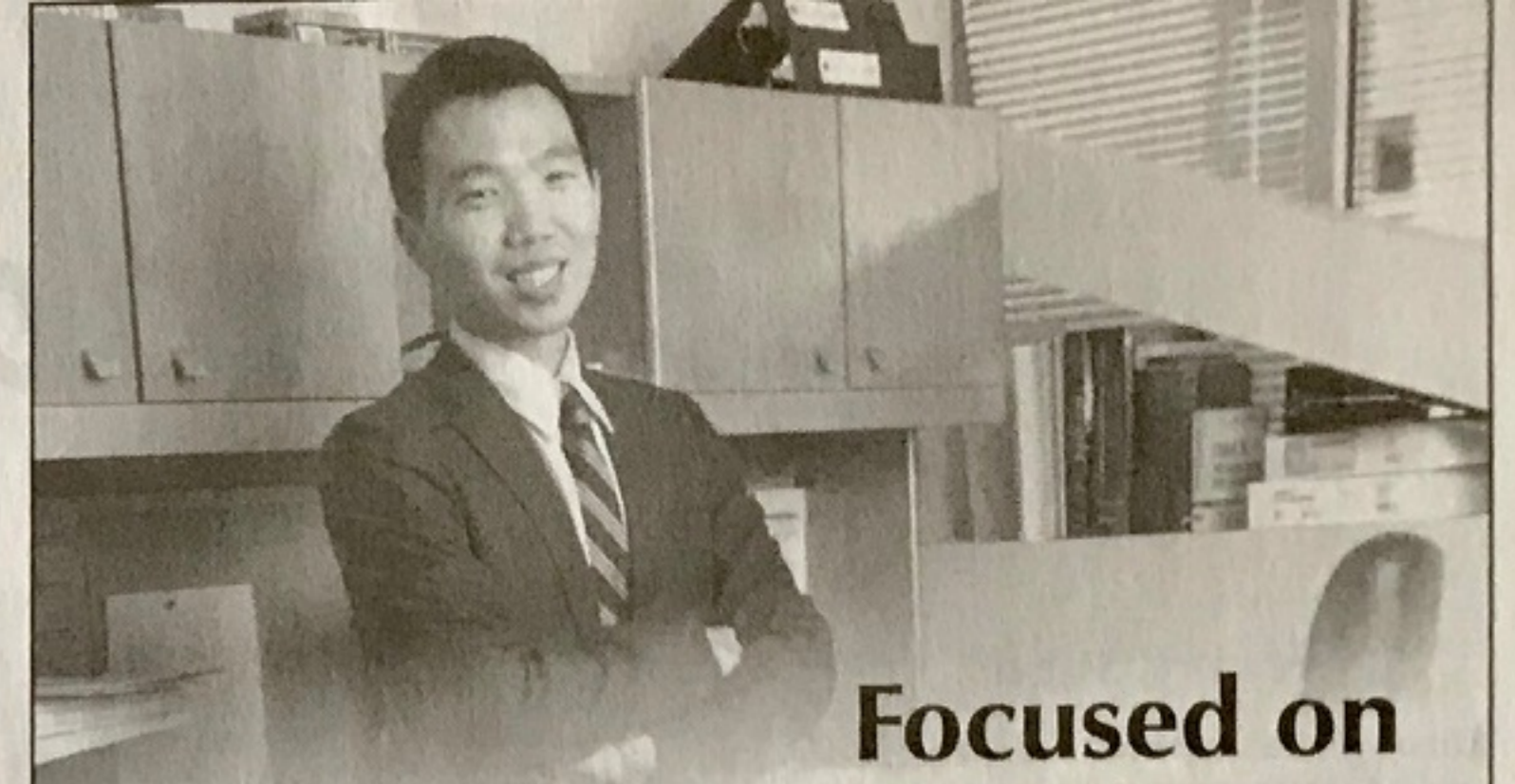
## What about skin of color?

According to Dawn Barilli, physician assistant, from Orange Dermatology in Monroe, sunscreen information pertains to all skin types and all skin colors. "The directions for use on sunscreen products are universal, and parents should apply the sunscreen just as directed for all skin colors. Skin of any color can be harmed by the UVA rays that cause skin cancer, and choosing a broad spectrum product is best."

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