

More Than a Fashion Statement

BY KAITLYN ROBERTSON

Most parents are aware of the danger the sun does to children's skin when it is exposed, slathering them in sunscreen before hitting the playground or the pool. However, these harmful ultra-violet (UV) rays are not limited to skin cancer; a child's eyes are just as susceptible.

Kids' developing eyes absorb more UV rays than adult eyes. By the time they reach adulthood, unprotected eyes have already been exposed to 80% of their lifetime allotment of UV. Protecting young eyes with sunglasses should be just as important as applying sunscreen to skin or wearing a hat. In fact, kids (like adults) should wear sunglasses regardless of the weather. UV radiation can cause damage even in cloudy or overcast conditions. Often times, more damage is caused in this weather than in full sun because people are unaware of their risk for exposure, assuming the clouds will provide them with protection.

Short-term effects of UV exposure

can include retinal sunburn and temporary changes in vision, while long-term effects can include cataracts, age-related macular degeneration, corneal sunburn, and skin cancer of or around the eye sockets or lids. According to Prevent Blindness America, children's sunglasses should block 99 to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays.

As retailers, providing a wide variety of youth sunglasses can make parents more aware of the importance of protecting little ones' eyes. Be knowledgeable about the pros and cons of lens specifications and what will provide the most protection. For example, lens color has nothing to do with the level of UV protection. As long as the lenses block 100% of the UV rays, lens color and tint density is a personal preference. Beware of children's sunglasses with labels marked, "blocks UV rays," without specifying the actual percentage of UV radiation the lenses absorb. These labels can be vague, misleading, and sometimes, blatantly false.

Although colorful, adolescent frame styles are available, a growing trend reflects many children's desire to look like their parents or older siblings. So emerges a group of kid-sized versions of hip adult styles. Wrap-around styles are trendy and functional, with their large temples helping to block UV rays from entering through the sides of the frame.



Here's a look at some of this season's newest kids' sunglasses.

Bollé has expanded its current children's line to include frames for kids aged 6 to 36 months. Dylan blocks harmful UVA and UVB rays. Teddy is made using Tefabloc, an extremely flexible elastomer material which will bend but not break and is non-toxic and hypoallergenic. An adjustable strap keeps the frames comfortably in place so eyes stay protected.

Julbo has introduced a new polarized kids' lens. Diego and Debora help to reduce pressure points on kids' heads with flexible temples. Also out this season are Solan and Rookie, which feature wide temples for side protection.

The Ray-Ban® Junior collection is a miniature version of the adult styles the brand is known for. Style No. RJ09522S boasts wide temples to protect the sides of the eyes and face.

Xtreme Chill and the Xtreme



Convertible are RKS' latest styles.

The Chill includes high-performance Xylex® frames with rubber-tipped temples and mirrored lenses. The Convertible lives up to its name with interchangeable temples and sports bands.

Skechers' children's collection, with standard polycarbonate lenses and UV protection, features kid-friendly colors, rhinestones, glitter, and some frames that change color (think mood rings) when exposed to sunlight.

Improvements to the original Baby Banz collection include silicone nose- and brow pieces, UV protection, a matching neoprene elastic strap, and side adjustable Velcro to allow the frames to grow with the child.

Informed retailers can do wonders in educating the public on the dangers of leaving developing eyes exposed to UV rays. With such a wide variety of brands expanding their lines to include children's sunglasses, more shelves should be stocked with these protective shields.

