

# Are you skipping this crucial part of your face when applying sunscreen?



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November 1, 2017

You know the drill when it comes to applying sunscreen: You slather it all over your body, and then go about your day. The process is so simple that it's easy to put on sunscreen without thinking about it. But new research suggests you really should pay attention when — and where — you apply.

People routinely miss 9.5 percent of their faces when they swipe on sunscreen, putting themselves at risk for skin cancer, according to a study published in the journal *PLOS One*. For the study, researchers asked 57 people to apply sunscreen and then took before and after photos with a UV-sensitive camera. The areas covered in sunscreen appeared black in the images.



When the researchers analyzed the images, they found that people consistently didn't cover their entire faces with sunscreen, and often missed two areas in particular: their eyelids and the area between the inner corner of the eye and the bridge of the nose. Even when they were given extra information about skin cancers of the eyelid region, the subjects left nearly 8 percent of their faces unprotected.

These seem like such small areas to worry about, but study coauthor Kevin Hamill of the University of Liverpool tells Yahoo Lifestyle that they matter. When people repeatedly miss protecting certain areas of their faces with sunscreen, they consistently expose those areas to sun damage. “This means that the same bits of skin ... are more likely to collect the critical mass of DNA damage that leads to cancer,” he says.

People also tend to alter their behavior when they think they’re protected from the sun, staying out in harmful rays longer than they would otherwise, Hamill says — and that continues to expose those vulnerable areas that aren’t covered with sunscreen in the process.

Skin cancer in the eye area is no joke either. The skin in this area is sensitive, so “removing skin cancer in those areas can potentially be more difficult and lead to more scarring or worse,” Gary Goldenberg, MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, tells Yahoo Lifestyle. Basal cell carcinoma on the inside of the bridge of the nose is a “particularly nasty cancer,” Hamill says. “The cancer often burrows into the eye socket and ultimately can lead to the eye having to be removed.”

Luckily, this is preventable, which is why it’s important to pay attention when you put on sunscreen, Joshua Zeichner, MD, a New York City-based dermatologist, tells Yahoo Lifestyle. “Applying sunscreen is like exercising on an elliptical machine,” he says. “If you put effort into it, you will get a good workout. Otherwise, you can glide along barely burning any calories. You need to take your time to apply sunscreen properly for it to work.”

The eye area is tough, since you don’t want to get any sunscreen into your eye itself, but Goldenberg says closing your eyes when you apply can help. You can also use a sunscreen in stick form to apply it, Zeichner says, which lowers the odds that excess lotion will get into your eyes. For added protection, make sure you’re wearing sunglasses that cover your eyes and the area around them, Goldenberg advises.