



**Dr. Peter Vignjevic**  
MD, dermatologist, Hamilton, Ontario  
talks to us about  
**protecting ourselves**  
from the sun

## DERMATOLOGIST'S corner

**Dermatological Expertise:** What does the term “total block” on sun-care product packaging mean?

**Dr. Vignjevic:** “Total block” means that the product will block out all sources of light—both visible and ultraviolet. In most cases, they are creams that contain titanium dioxide or zinc oxide. This is different from a broad-spectrum block which protects against ultraviolet light primarily.

**DE:** What should we look for when choosing a sunscreen?

**Dr. V:** A sunscreen should offer you both UVB and UVA protection, and have a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. It should also be waterproof.

**DE:** We often hear the term “photostability.” How important is this?

**Dr. V:** If a sunscreen is not photostable, it will degrade rapidly when exposed to the sun and lose its effectiveness. Some sunscreens lose up to 50% of their potency after being exposed to the sun for just 60 minutes.

**DE:** Do we need to reapply sunscreen regularly even if the SPF is high?

**Dr. V:** It is extremely important to reapply sunscreen often—at least once every hour if you swim or sweat a lot. Otherwise, it is recommended every three to four hours. You should also know that SPF numbers are calculated and measured according to 2 mg/cm<sup>2</sup>, but the average population only uses 0.5 to 1 mg/cm<sup>2</sup>—that’s only half the amount recommended! So, even if you use a cream with a high SPF, if you don’t apply enough, you won’t be fully protected. On average, you need to use 30 to 40 ml per application, per person, per day to get the maximum effect.

**DE:** We hear more and more about “polymorphous light eruption.” What is this?

**Dr. V:** PMLE is an skin inflammation of unknown cause that appears in the spring and gradually disappears during the summer. It usually appears after the skin is exposed to the sun for 4 to 24 hours and lasts between 10 to 15 days, if the area is not re-exposed to the sun. The irritation is very uncomfortable and causes severe itching. Basic Treatment consists of shielding the skin with physical protection, such as clothes or broad-spectrum sunscreen and anti-histamine.

**DE:** What’s your advice for enjoying a safe summer?

**Dr. V:** To minimize the risk of sunburn and skin cancer, you should avoid sun exposure between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., wear a large-rimmed hat, and cover yourself as much as possible with long-sleeve clothing and full-length pants or skirts. It’s also very important to wear a broad-spectrum, quality sunscreen and reapply it frequently. Pregnant women or women taking oral contraceptives should definitely cover themselves in sun creams with an SPF of at least 30, since unprotected exposure can aggravate dark blotches on the cheeks and forehead. Some medicines currently used to fight acne, such as antibiotics and retinoids, increase the risk of sunburn.

Finally, in order to spend a safe summer, one of the brands I recommend and prescribe, is Anthélios.

Peter Vignjevic M.D.