

Suiting up for sun

Despite our mercilessly short summer, Canadians are making waves for ingenious UV-safe swimwear

BY DEIRDRE KELLY

A few years ago when looking for swimwear that would shield my newborn's virgin skin I found several sun-protecting bodysuits from always-sunny Australia.

They cost about \$90 each. But there was little alternative. The Canadian Dermatology Association urges parents not to put sunscreen on infants under six months of age. T-shirts block only about 10 per cent of the UVA and UVB rays that are responsible for skin cancer.

Recently, however, the retail climate has become sunnier.

A number of domestic companies specializing in UV blocking swimwear have sprouted from coast to coast. Their lightweight product is not only cheaper by half, it is fast gaining world-wide recognition as among the best sun-protective gear out there for children.

Tested by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency, clothing companies like SurfDuk UV Activewear in Vancouver, NoZone Clothing Company in Victoria and SunSmart in Toronto have SPF ratings of 50 plus, meaning they block about 98 per cent of the sun's UV rays.

People in countries as far away as Guam and Sai Pan have been ordering the Canadian bodysuits online, and recommending them to their friends. Business is booming, say the Canucks, who are poised to expand their operations next year. Chris Shepard, co-owner and president of NoZone, says, "We're growing at an unbelievable rate. Sales are up dramatically from last year, by at least 50 per cent."

How surprising is it that Canada,

which typically enjoys only about two months of summer a year, is fast becoming a leader in the sun-protection clothing business?

"It's hardly surprising at all," continues Shepard.

"Our summers might be short, but as most of us know, it is easy to get a sunburn in Canada, and all you need is one to cause significant damage."

Canadians should be especially cautious because the ozone layer is still thinning, particularly over Southern Ontario, home to the country's highest UV Index.

Brenda Kent, the Canadian Cancer Society's prevention coordinator, notes that both melanoma and non-melanoma forms of skin cancer are on the rise.

"There is a lot we can do to prevent skin cancer so those rates are quite high."

To help counter the sun's blistering rays, NoZone uses a revolutionary new polyester fabric that is highly resistant to chlorine and salt water damage.

Each suit is carefully constructed using four thread stitching of a highly durable nylon thread.

Joanne Speight, founder of Toronto's SunSmart, uses a four-way stretch fabric that is a nylon and lycra blend. Acting like a thermometer that measures UV levels, the fabric changes colour in response to the sun's potential to burn the skin.

"In moderate UV levels the colours in the suit are pale; but when it's full UV the suit changes to a darker colour. Parents should either apply a 30-plus sunblock, or bring the kids inside."

SunSmart is especially sensitive to the needs of babies, and unlike



SunSmart swimsuit, \$39.95, comes with a free towel cape (regularly \$10) at www.sunsmartstore.com or 1-866-726-1827.

its competitors has created a line of suits that are for the very, very young. Sizes start at 0 and all infant suits have a zipper between the legs to facilitate quick diaper changes. All are also endowed with a whimsical sense of style. A star-spangled suit comes with a detachable terry cloth towel cape that makes any child feel and look like a super hero.

Speight, a mother of two small boys who just entering her second

year of business, created the line when she could no longer stomach paying those hefty fees for the Australian suits.

"Mine cost \$35. That's not a lot to spend to make sure your kids don't fry."

Sources

www.sunsmartstore.com,
1-866-726-1827

www.nozone.ca, 1-888-521-9798
www.surfduk.com, 1-888-787-3385
www.sunseals.com, 416-255-1877