



Pet's Guide to Safer Sunscreens

My pals at EWG have been talking an awful lot about sunscreen lately. That's partly because it's summer (and in Washington D.C., summer is serious business!). But it's mostly because they just released a big investigation of almost 1,000 different sunscreens -- and they've got some bad news. It turns out that 4 out of every 5 sunscreens that humans use to protect their furless skin either don't work the way they supposed to, or they've got chemicals that could make people sick over time.

That got me wondering about sunscreens for animals. After all, we like to spend time in the sun during the summer. But if no one is looking out for people sunscreen, you can bet your biscuit no one's making sure ours is any good. So I did some investigating.

I think it goes without saying that you should put these sunscreens where you won't be licking them off--like tips of ears, top of nose, and other spots where fur is thin -- and don't forget to reapply after taking a swim!

Here are all the pet sunscreens I could find online, from best to worst:

1. VetOne UVet Sunscreen Lotion

SPF 40, for horses, dogs, and cats (\$5.99 for 2 fl oz lotion)

Of the 10 pet sunscreens I could find online, this one's the best. It's fully labeled, and contains titanium dioxide. But octyl methoxycinnamate is of moderate concern scores a 4 in Skin Deep and it contains other ingredients to avoid whenever you can: propylene glycol, triethanolamine, imidurea, parabens.

2. VetOne UVet Sunscreen Spray

SPF 40, for horses, dogs, and cats (\$15.85 for 16 fl oz spray)

Not bad. Same formula as the lotion above. Best bet for horses since sprays are easiest, but be careful not to inhale it! (Sprays are less safe than lotions because you can inhale the chemicals.)

3. VetOne Uvet Sunscreen Lotion

SPF 15, for dogs (\$4.49 for 2 fl oz lotion)

Full label listing, and it even contains titanium dioxide, which is good, but also a few nasties: propylene glycol, triethanolamine, imidurea, parabens. And it's a spray, and the SPF is lower

than 30 (that's EWG's threshold of SPF safety.) It's alright but you might get burnt, so pack something else for the beach. Note that kitties should not use this product!

4. Nutri-Vet Sun Defense Sunscreen for Dogs

SPF 15, for dogs (\$8.99 for 4 oz spray)

Same exact ingredients as the VetOne lotion above, but it's a spray, which is bad because you can inhale the chemicals. But there's a full label listing, and it even contains titanium dioxide, which is good, but also a few nasties: propylene glycol, triethanolamine, imidurea, parabens. It's alright, but I'd avoid it. Not for kitties!

5. Veterinarian's Best Sun Spray Sunscreen with Aloe Vera

SPF 15, for dogs (\$5.39 for 4 oz spray)

This one has incomplete label information, but zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are good and at least the SPF is listed. And it's a spray. It's okay, but there are better options. Also not for kitties!

6. SPF 8, for horses (\$11.90 for 32 fl oz spray)

This one's not meant to be a sunscreen, really, which you can tell from the SPF, and octyl methoxycinnamate is of moderate concern and not too good at blocking UVA. Plus there's fragrance, DMDM hydantoin scores a 7-9 in Skin Deep, tocopheryl acetate, and octoxynol 9 scores 8. And it's a spray. Use only if you're a horse who wants a shiny coat and minimal sun protection.

7. Filta-Bac Sunfilter and Antibacterial Cream

No SPF listed, for dogs, horses, cattle, sheep, and goats (\$20 for 220 g cream)

Between the incomplete label information, no listed SPF, benzalkonium chloride scores a 6 in Skin Deep, and that it's not really meant to be only a sunscreen, I have to say avoid. But it does contain zinc oxide and titanium dioxide, which are good sunblockers. I'd avoid this one unless you have a boo-boo and aren't worried about getting sunburnt.

8. Epi-Pet Sun Protector Spray

No SPF listed, for dogs and horses (\$17.95 for 4.0 oz spray)

This one contains benzophenone-3, aka oxybenzone which scores an 8 in Skin Deep, plus it has ethylhexyl methoxycinnamate and no listed SPF, and it's a spray. Avoid!

9. Healthy Hair Care Products for Horses, Sunflower Sunscreens with Sunflower Extract and Conditioners.

No SPF listed, for horses (\$12.90 for 32 fl oz spray)

The label has an incomplete ingredient list, and I can't find any evidence that sunflower extract blocks UVA radiation (like the label says). Plus the UVB blocker isn't listed at all, and it's a spray. Avoid this one, ponies!

10. Doggles Pet Sunscreen

SPF 15, for dogs (\$12.99 for 2 oz spray)

No ingredients listed at all, and it's an easily inhalable spray. Hmm. Avoid this one for sure!