

sunscreen lotion

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Sunscreen Lotion

The reference format for sun protection. **In the United States sunscreen is an OTC drug, not a cosmetic** — it is the largest and most consequential drug/cosmetic split in this catalogue, and it explains almost every difference between the American sunscreen shelf and everyone else's.

The transatlantic difference

	United States	European Union
Status	OTC drug — sunscreen monograph, Drug Facts panel, active ingredients listed first, printed expiration date	Cosmetic under Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009
New filters	Require a drug pathway; no new filter has been added in decades	Added to the Annex VI positive list — 34 permitted filters — after SCCS assessment
Max labelled SPF	"50+"	"50+"
UVA labelling	The Broad Spectrum test must be passed to use the term	The UVA-in-circle logo , requiring UVA protection $\geq$? of the SPF

Water resistance	40 or 80 minutes , tested; "waterproof" and "sweatproof" are prohibited	Similar tested claims
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The practical consequence: filters that are routine in Europe, Japan and Korea — Tinosorb S and M, Uvinul A Plus, Mexoryl and others — **are not available in US products**, because adding them requires clearing a drug approval pathway rather than a cosmetic ingredient listing.

FDA's proposed order under the CARES Act found only **zinc oxide and titanium dioxide** generally recognised as safe and effective; **PABA and trolamine salicylate not GRASE**; and twelve others, including oxybenzone, avobenzone and octinoxate, **requiring further data**. That proposal is not final, and the twelve remain on the market meanwhile.

The two numbers

- **SPF** measures protection against **UVB** — the wavelengths that cause sunburn. SPF 30 blocks roughly 97% of UVB; SPF 50 roughly 98%. The **jump from 15 to 30 matters more than the jump from 30 to 50**, and no sunscreen blocks everything.
- **UVA** penetrates deeper, drives photoageing and contributes to skin cancer, and **is not measured by SPF at all**. This is why "Broad Spectrum" in the US and the UVA logo in the EU exist, and why an SPF number alone is an incomplete description.

Dose — the thing that actually decides protection

SPF is measured at 2 mg/cm². For a whole adult body that is roughly **35 ml — about six teaspoons, or a shot glass**. For a face and neck, roughly **a third of a teaspoon**, or the "two-finger" rule.

Almost nobody applies that much. Applied at half the tested rate, the protection achieved is far below the labelled SPF — not half, but disproportionately less. **Under-application is the single biggest reason sunscreen underperforms**, and it is free to fix.

Then: **reapply every two hours**, and after swimming, towelling or heavy sweating, whatever the water-resistance claim says.

Using it properly

- **15–30 minutes before going out**, so the film forms.
- **Every exposed area** — the ears, the back of the neck, the tops of the feet, the scalp part line, the lips with a balm.
- **Reapply on schedule**, not when you remember.
- **It is the last skincare step and the first makeup step**.
- **Cloud and window glass are not protection**. UVA passes through glass; UVB largely does not.
- **Sunscreen is one layer of protection**. Shade, timing, clothing, a hat and sunglasses do more, and are free.

Shelf life

Carries a **printed expiration date** in the US, and it means what it says — **filter degradation is real**, and avobenzone in particular is photounstable and requires stabilising. Typically three years from manufacture.

Discard anything that has separated, changed colour or smell, or been left in a hot car for a season — heat accelerates degradation, and a car in summer is the worst storage in this catalogue.

Related

- [Sun and Tanning](#) — the shelf this sits on, and the rest of it.
- [Cosmetics](#) — what the label is legally allowed to say, and the full catalogue.
- The rest of *Sunscreen* — [Sunscreen Spray](#) · [Sunscreen Stick](#) · [Mineral Sunscreen](#) · [Chemical Sunscreen](#) · [Facial Sunscreen](#).
- [Health and Wellness](#) — where skin cancer prevention belongs.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.