

Q12: What advice should we give to patients regarding the use of sunscreen on the day of phototherapy prior to treatment?

A: For most patients, using sunscreens on large areas of the body on the day of phototherapy, prior to UV exposure would not be standard practice and should be avoided. One main issue is that it would effectively reduce the effectiveness of the UV exposure and consequently the clinical improvement. However, another potentially greater risk could occur whereby the same area was not covered in a similar amount of the same sunscreen prior to a subsequent exposure and then developed erythema as it had not been subject to an incremental exposure.

The setting where sunscreen is sometimes used prior to UV exposure is that of herpes labialis (“Cold sores”) being triggered by UV exposure. In some patients who are prone to this (they may have had it previously on earlier phototherapy courses) nursing staff may apply a high factor sunscreen to the area around the mouth/nose prior to exposure at each visit. If this is continued for a number of exposures, the nurse and patient have to be careful to ensure the same sunscreen is applied to the same area of the face each time.

In some cases, if the rest of the face may benefit from UV exposure, a face mask is not used until further in to the course, or possibly not at all during the course. However, if the face has no significant skin condition areas that require treatment, a decision may be made at the start or early on in the course to use a face mask at that point and not use any sunscreen around the mouth/lips.