

KORA JAMES & CO.

PREVENTATIVE SKINCARE

A FOUNDER'S GUIDE

The Prevention Playbook

A parent's field guide to protecting your baby's skin barrier before irritation starts — heat rash, ingredient red flags, sun, laundry, and the seasonal stuff nobody warns you about.

THE FOUNDER'S NOTE

Prevention, not reaction.

I started Kora James & Co. after spending far too many nights googling red, irritated skin at 2am, wondering what I could have done differently earlier in the day. What I found, over and over, was the same theme: almost everything we treat after the fact could have been prevented in the first place, if we'd known what to look for.

I'm a Navy veteran, not a dermatologist. But I've spent the last few years going deep into the research on baby skin barrier health, ingredient

safety, and the small daily habits that actually move the needle — so you don't have to spend your evenings doing the same.

This guide is everything I wish someone had handed me. It's not about fear, and it's not about doing everything perfectly. It's about knowing the handful of things that matter most, so you can prevent the problem instead of chasing the cure.

Keep this close. Highlight it. Come back to it every season. And when "The Before" launches, you'll already understand exactly why we built it the way we did.

— *Kirsten*

FOUNDER, KORA JAMES & CO.

Table of Contents

01	Understanding Baby Skin	04
02	Heat Rash Prevention	06
03	Ingredient Red Flags	09
04	The Sunscreen Guide	12
05	Fabric & Laundry	15
06	Seasonal Threats	18
07	Building a Prevention Routine	21
08	The One-Page Version	24
09	A Final Word	25
10	Works Cited	26

This guide is educational and general in nature. For concerns specific to your baby, always consult your pediatrician.

CHAPTER ONE

Understanding Baby Skin

Why a newborn's skin behaves so differently from yours
— and why "prevention" even matters in the first place.

O I

The barrier is still under construction.

Baby skin isn't just smaller and softer than adult skin — it's structurally different. The outermost layer, the stratum corneum, is up to 30% thinner in infants than in adults, and it keeps developing for the first two to three years of life. That thinner barrier means moisture escapes faster, irritants penetrate more easily, and temperature regulation is far less efficient.

This is why the same sunscreen, detergent, or fragrance that does nothing to your skin can trigger redness, rash, or irritation on your baby's. It's not that their skin is "sensitive" in some vague sense — it's that the physical barrier doing the protecting simply isn't finished yet.

THREE THINGS THAT MAKE BABY SKIN UNIQUELY VULNERABLE

SURFACE AREA

A baby's skin surface area is large relative to body weight — meaning anything applied topically is absorbed at a proportionally higher rate than in adults.

THIN BARRIER

A thinner stratum corneum allows faster water loss and easier entry for irritants, allergens, and environmental triggers.

IMMATURE REGULATION

Sweat gland and temperature regulation systems are still maturing, making babies more prone to overheating and heat-triggered rashes.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

None of this is meant to alarm you — it's meant to reframe how you think about baby skincare. Instead of asking "what do I use to fix this rash," the more useful question is "what conditions caused the barrier to get overwhelmed in the first place, and how do I avoid recreating them." That single shift in thinking is the foundation of everything else in this guide.

THE PREVENTION MINDSET

Every chapter that follows is built around one idea: the fewer times the barrier gets overwhelmed, the fewer flare-ups, rashes, and reactions you'll deal with — and the stronger that barrier becomes over time.

CHAPTER TWO

Heat Rash Prevention

The single most common — and most preventable — baby skin complaint. Here's what actually causes it and how to stay ahead of it.

02

What heat rash actually is.

Heat rash (miliaria) happens when sweat gets trapped beneath the skin because a pore is blocked or overwhelmed — not necessarily because your baby is in a hot climate. It shows up most often on the neck, chest, shoulders, and diaper area — anywhere skin folds trap heat and moisture against itself.

Because a baby's sweat ducts are still developing, they're more prone to this blockage than older children or adults. The good news: heat rash is almost entirely preventable once you understand its handful of common triggers.

"Heat rash isn't a hygiene problem or a parenting failure — it's a mechanical one. Fix the mechanics, and the rash has nowhere to start."

COMMON TRIGGERS

- Overdressing — especially layering a onesie under a sleep sack in a warm room
- Synthetic or non-breathable fabrics that trap heat against the skin
- Occlusive lotions or thick barrier creams applied in warm weather, which can trap sweat rather than let it evaporate
- Car seats and carriers — the back and neck are common hot spots on warm days
- Fever, which raises baseline body temperature and sweat production

Your prevention checklist.

BEFORE IT STARTS

- ✓ Dress one layer lighter than you'd dress yourself — babies regulate heat less efficiently, not more
- ✓ Choose breathable, natural fabrics (cotton, bamboo) over synthetic blends, especially for sleepwear
- ✓ Keep nursery and car temperatures moderate; a cool room is safer than a warm one
- ✓ Check the back of the neck, not the hands or feet, to judge if baby is overheated
- ✓ Apply barrier products before heat exposure, not thick, occlusive creams that trap moisture in

AT THE FIRST SIGN

- ✓ Move to a cooler space and remove a layer immediately
- ✓ Pat (don't rub) the area dry if sweaty
- ✓ Let the skin breathe, uncovered, when possible
- ✓ Avoid thick ointments on active rash — they can trap more heat in

WHERE TO LOOK FIRST

Neck folds

Diaper area

Behind the knees

Underarms

Car seat contact points

WHEN TO CALL YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Most heat rash resolves within a day or two of cooling and airing out the skin. If you notice fever, pus, spreading redness, or the rash isn't improving after 2–3 days, check in with your pediatrician.

CHAPTER THREE

Ingredient Red Flags

The labels worth pausing on — and the ones you can skip past without a second thought.

03

Reading a label without losing your mind.

Ingredient lists can feel designed to overwhelm you. The truth is, you don't need to memorize a chemistry textbook — you need a short list of ingredient categories worth a second look, and permission to stop worrying about the rest.

Below are the ingredient families most commonly flagged by pediatric dermatology researchers for baby and sensitive-skin products, along with why they draw attention.

WORTH A SECOND LOOK

FRAGRANCE / PARFUM

An umbrella term that can hide dozens of undisclosed compounds. The single most common cause of contact irritation in baby skincare products.

PARABENS

Preservatives (methylparaben, propylparaben, etc.) associated with skin sensitivity in some studies; increasingly phased out of baby-specific lines.

PEG COMPOUNDS

Used as thickeners and penetration enhancers; manufacturing byproducts can be a concern, and PEGs increase how much of everything else absorbs.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

- *Phenoxyethanol* — a common preservative alternative to parabens; generally considered low-risk in small concentrations, but worth limiting on newborns and in leave-on products used frequently
- *Essential oils* — "natural" doesn't mean non-irritating; lavender and citrus oils are common sensitizers on infant skin
- *Sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS)* — a harsh detergent/foaming agent that can strip the skin barrier, more relevant in washes than lotions

The label-reading shortcut.

You don't need to scrutinize every product you own. Save the deep read for anything that stays on the skin for hours — lotions, mists, diaper creams — and worry less about rinse-off products like shampoo, where contact time is seconds, not hours.

PRODUCT TYPE	CONTACT TIME	SCRUTINY LEVEL
Leave-on lotion / mist	Hours	High — read the full list
Diaper cream	Hours, occluded	High — occlusion increases absorption
Bath wash / shampoo	Seconds, rinsed	Low-moderate
Laundry detergent	Indirect, residue only	Moderate

A SIMPLE RULE

If a product will sit on your baby's skin for more than a few minutes, treat the ingredient list like it matters — because it does. If it's rinsed off in seconds, you can relax a little.

BUILDING YOUR OWN "AVOID LIST"

Rather than trying to memorize dozens of chemical names, pick your top three non-negotiables and screen for those consistently. For most parents building a clean routine, fragrance, parabens, and PEGs cover the majority of common irritants — which is exactly why they anchor Kora James & Co.'s own formulation standards.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Sunscreen Guide

Mineral or chemical, how much, and how often — the questions every parent asks at the pool.



Mineral vs. chemical.

Sunscreens work in one of two ways: mineral (physical) filters sit on top of the skin and reflect UV rays, while chemical filters absorb into the skin and convert UV radiation into heat. For babies, the distinction matters more than it does for adults.

	MINERAL (ZINC OXIDE / TITANIUM DIOXIDE)	CHEMICAL (OXYBENZONE, AVOBENZONE, ETC.)
How it works	Sits on skin surface, reflects UV	Absorbs into skin, converts UV to heat
Absorption	Minimal	Higher — more relevant given thinner infant barrier
Common recommendation	Preferred for infants and sensitive skin	Generally recommended after 6 months, if used
Texture	Can leave a white cast	Typically more cosmetically elegant

UNDER 6 MONTHS

Pediatric guidance generally recommends keeping infants under 6 months out of direct sun and relying on shade, clothing, and hats as the primary defense — with mineral sunscreen on exposed areas (face, hands) only when shade isn't available.

Application prevention tips.

Most sun-related skin issues in babies aren't about which sunscreen you chose — they're about application habits. These small adjustments prevent the majority of sunburn and heat-related irritation.

- ✓ Apply 15–20 minutes before sun exposure, not on the way out the door
- ✓ Reapply every 2 hours, and immediately after swimming or heavy sweating — even "water resistant" formulas wear off
- ✓ Don't forget commonly missed spots: ears, tops of feet, back of the neck, part line on the scalp
- ✓ Combine sunscreen with physical barriers — UPF clothing, wide-brim hats, and shade — rather than relying on sunscreen alone
- ✓ Test any new sunscreen on a small patch of skin 24–48 hours before full application, especially for babies with a history of sensitivity

THE FIVE-SECOND VERSION

Shade first

UPF clothing

Wide-brim hat

Reapply every 2 hrs

Patch test new
products

PEAK HOURS

UV exposure is strongest between 10am and 4pm. Scheduling outdoor time earlier or later in the day is one of the simplest, lowest-effort prevention strategies available to you.

CHAPTER FIVE

Fabric & Laundry

What's touching your baby's skin for 10+ hours a day –
and the hidden irritants in the wash cycle.

05

The fabric your baby sleeps in.

Clothing and bedding spend more continuous hours against your baby's skin than any skincare product ever will. That makes fabric choice — and what's used to wash it — one of the highest-leverage, lowest-effort prevention decisions you can make.

FABRIC DYES AND FINISHES

Bright, saturated colors and "wrinkle-free" or "stain-resistant" finishes are often achieved with chemical treatments — including formaldehyde-based resins used to set dye and reduce wrinkling. These finishes can cause contact irritation in sensitive infants, particularly in tight-fitting items like onesies and swaddles.

LOOK FOR

OEKO-TEX certified fabrics, undyed or naturally-dyed cotton, and looser knit weaves that breathe.

BE CAUTIOUS WITH

Deeply saturated colors on tight-fitting items, "wrinkle-free" or "easy care" labeled fabrics, and unfamiliar synthetic blends.

SIMPLE HABIT

Wash all new clothing and bedding before first wear — this removes a meaningful portion of manufacturing residue and loose dye.

What's in the wash cycle.

Detergent and fabric softener residue is one of the most overlooked causes of recurring, unexplained rash — because the irritant isn't the outfit itself, it's what's left behind in the fibers after washing.

"If the rash follows the outfit, not the weather, look at the wash — not the wardrobe."

LAUNDRY PREVENTION CHECKLIST

- ✓ Choose fragrance-free detergent for baby items, even if you use scented detergent for the rest of the household
- ✓ Skip fabric softener and dryer sheets on baby laundry — both leave a coating residue that can trap irritants against the skin
- ✓ Run an extra rinse cycle if your machine allows it, especially for cloth diapers or anything worn against sensitive areas
- ✓ Wash baby items separately, at least for the first few months, to avoid cross-contamination with adult detergent residue
- ✓ If a rash appears repeatedly on covered areas but not exposed skin, laundry residue is one of the first things worth ruling out

QUICK TEST

Suspect detergent residue? Switch one load to a fragrance-free, dye-free formula and skip the dryer sheet. Most sensitivity-related rashes noticeably improve within one to two wash cycles.

CHAPTER SIX

Seasonal Threats

The skin stressors that show up with the calendar —
wildfire smoke, swimmer's ear, and weather extremes.

06

Wildfire smoke & air quality.

Wildfire season has become a recurring reality in many parts of the country, and its effects on skin are easy to overlook next to the more obvious respiratory concerns. Particulate matter in smoke can settle on skin and, combined with dryness from ash-heavy air, trigger irritation and barrier disruption — especially on already-sensitive baby skin.

PREVENTION DURING POOR AIR QUALITY DAYS

- ✓ Check local air quality index (AQI) before extended outdoor time; treat anything above "moderate" as a cue to limit exposure
- ✓ Gently cleanse exposed skin (face, hands) after any outdoor time on smoky days to remove settled particulate
- ✓ Increase barrier support with a fragrance-free moisturizer during smoke events — dry, ash-laden air pulls moisture from skin faster than usual
- ✓ Keep windows closed and use an air purifier in the nursery if smoke is present in your area

PREVENTION INSIGHT

The skin doesn't need to be visibly dirty to be irritated by smoke exposure — a gentle cleanse and barrier moisturizer after outdoor time is a preventive habit, not a reactive one.

Swimmer's ear & water exposure.

Swimmer's ear (otitis externa) isn't an internal ear infection — it's a skin condition of the ear canal, caused by trapped moisture creating an environment where bacteria or fungus can thrive. It's entirely a prevention story: keep the canal dry, and it largely can't take hold.

PREVENTION CHECKLIST

- ✓ Tilt baby's head to each side after bath or swim time to help trapped water drain naturally
- ✓ Gently dry the outer ear with a soft towel — never insert cotton swabs or anything into the ear canal itself
- ✓ Limit prolonged submersion in pool or lake water during periods of frequent ear sensitivity
- ✓ If you notice tugging at the ear, fussiness during feeding, or a foul odor, check in with your pediatrician before it progresses

OTHER SEASONAL CONSIDERATIONS

WINTER DRYNESS

Indoor heating strips humidity from the air. A humidifier and consistent barrier moisturizer prevent the cracked, chapped skin common in cold months.

SPRING ALLERGENS

Pollen can settle on skin much like smoke particulate. A rinse after extended outdoor time reduces contact-driven irritation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Building a Prevention Routine

Turning everything in this guide into a simple daily and seasonal rhythm you can actually maintain.

07

A simple daily rhythm.

Prevention doesn't require a complicated regimen — it requires a small number of consistent habits, done at the right moments. Here's a simple daily structure to build around.

MORNING

Dress and protect

Dress one layer lighter than you'd dress yourself. Apply a lightweight, fragrance-free barrier product to prevention-prone areas (neck folds, diaper area) before the day heats up.

MIDDAY / OUTDOOR TIME

Check and reassess

Check air quality if applicable. Apply mineral sunscreen 15–20 minutes before sun exposure. Reassess layers if temperature has changed since morning.

AFTER BATH / SWIM

Drain and moisturize

Tilt head to drain ears, pat (don't rub) skin dry, and moisturize damp skin within a few minutes to lock in hydration while the barrier is most receptive.

EVENING

Look before sleep

Do a quick skin check — neck folds, diaper area, behind the knees — for early redness before it becomes irritation. Dress for sleep in breathable fabric, one layer lighter than feels intuitive.

Your seasonal reset.

Beyond the daily rhythm, a quick seasonal check-in keeps prevention ahead of whatever the calendar brings next.

SEASON	WATCH FOR	ADJUST
Summer	Heat rash, sunburn, chlorine exposure	Lighter layers, mineral SPF, rinse after pool time
Fall	Wildfire smoke, transitional dryness	Check AQI, introduce a barrier moisturizer
Winter	Indoor heat dryness, chapping	Humidifier, thicker (but still fragrance-free) moisturizer
Spring	Pollen, fabric changes for warmer weather	Post-outdoor rinse, reassess fabric weight

THE ONE HABIT THAT
MATTERS MOST

If you take nothing else from this guide: check skin folds daily, dress one layer lighter than instinct says, and choose fragrance-free for anything that sits on the skin for more than a few minutes. These three habits alone prevent the majority of common baby skin issues.

QUICK REFERENCE

The one-page version.

THE THREE HABITS

Check skin folds daily. Dress one layer lighter than instinct says. Choose fragrance-free for anything that sits on the skin for more than a few minutes.

THE DAILY RHYTHM

MORNING	One layer lighter; barrier product on neck folds and diaper area before the day heats up.
MIDDAY	Check AQI. Mineral sunscreen 15–20 minutes before sun. Reassess layers.
AFTER WATER	Tilt head to drain ears, pat dry, moisturize damp skin within a few minutes.
EVENING	Skin check: neck folds, diaper area, behind the knees. Breathable sleepwear.

SCREEN THE LABEL FOR THREE THINGS

Fragrance	Parabens	PEGs
-----------	----------	------

Read the full list on anything that stays on the skin for hours. Relax on anything rinsed off in seconds.

THE SEASONAL RESET

SUMMER	Lighter layers, mineral SPF, rinse after pool time.
FALL	Check AQI, introduce a barrier moisturizer.
WINTER	Humidifier, thicker (but still fragrance-free) moisturizer.
SPRING	Post-outdoor rinse, reassess fabric weight.

CHECK THESE FIVE PLACES

Neck folds	Diaper area
Behind the knees	Underarms
Car seat contact points	

CALL THE PEDIATRICIAN

Fever, pus, spreading redness, a rash not improving after 2–3 days, ear tugging, fussiness during feeding, or a foul odor.

You don't need to do everything.

Just the things that matter.

Prevention isn't about perfection, and it isn't about adding one more overwhelming checklist to your day. It's about knowing the handful of things that genuinely move the needle — and letting go of the rest.

That's exactly the philosophy behind everything we're building at Kora James & Co., starting with our first product, The Before — a lightweight daily barrier mist designed to prevent heat rash before it starts, made with organic aloe, oat extract, and Ectoin, and formulated without phenoxyethanol, parabens, or PEG derivatives.

THE WAITLIST

Be first to know when The Before launches.

Join the waitlist for early access, launch-day pricing, and the ingredient education we don't post anywhere else.

WHAT IT IS

A lightweight daily barrier mist

MADE WITH

Organic aloe, oat extract,
Ectoin

FORMULATED WITHOUT

Phenoxyethanol, parabens, PEG
derivatives

INGREDIENTS

Aloe Barbadensis (Aloe Vera) Leaf Juice, Water (Aqua), Propanediol, Panthenol, Ectoin, Hydroxypropyl Guar, Gluconolactone, Sodium Benzoate, Citric Acid, Sodium Citrate, Glycerin, Avena Sativa (Oat) Kernel Extract, Potassium Sorbate, Sodium Benzoate.

HELLO@KORAJAMESCO.COM

@KORAJAMESCO

JOIN THE WAITLIST

Works Cited

-
- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>01 Nikolovski, J. et al. — Journal of Investigative Dermatology (2008)</p> <p>Documented that infant stratum corneum is up to 30% thinner than adult skin, with barrier development continuing through the first year of life.</p> | <p>05 WebMD (medically reviewed) — "Am I Allergic to My Clothes?"</p> <p>Explains formaldehyde resins and textile dyes as common causes of contact dermatitis in wrinkle-resistant and dyed fabrics.</p> |
| <p>02 Mayo Clinic — "Heat rash (miliaria)"</p> <p>Overview of causes, risk factors, and prevention of heat rash, including the role of immature sweat ducts in newborns.</p> | <p>06 American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) — Atopic Dermatitis Skin Care Tips</p> <p>Clarifies the difference between "fragrance-free" and "unscented" laundry and skincare products for sensitive skin.</p> |
| <p>03 Environmental Working Group (EWG) — Skin Deep® Database</p> <p>Ingredient-level guidance on parabens, fragrance, and other additives worth limiting in baby and child skincare products.</p> | <p>07 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) — "Protect Children from Wildfires, Smoke, and Volcanic Ash"</p> <p>Details children's heightened vulnerability to smoke exposure and practical steps to reduce it.</p> |
| <p>04 HealthyChildren.org, American Academy of Pediatrics — "Sun Safety and Protection Tips"</p> <p>Guidance on mineral sunscreen, sun exposure limits, and protective clothing for infants under and over 6 months.</p> | <p>08 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) — "Preventing Swimmer's Ear"</p> <p>Drying techniques and prevention strategies for otitis externa (swimmer's ear) in children.</p> |
-

This guide is educational and general in nature. For concerns specific to your baby, always consult your pediatrician.