

Not all sunscreens work the same

By Alexandra Sifferlin, Time

Not all sunscreens are created equal. That's the message being pushed by the Food and Drug Administration, which this summer will start requiring makers to say whether their products protect against both ultraviolet-A and ultraviolet-B rays.

UVA rays are always present, even on cloudy days, and cause skin aging. UVB rays are largely responsible for burns. Both can cause cancer.

What the labels won't tell you is that while U.S. sunscreens are safe to use, they're not as protective as they could be. Eight applications for cutting-edge ingredients – like bisoctrizole, which reflects and scatters UV rays – have been pending with the FDA for years.

All are deemed safe in Europe, where they're common in creams from L'Oréal, among other makers. Those sunscreens can be purchased online – but U.S. buyers must pay hefty shipping costs.

Why the delay? Not only does the FDA test for safety and efficacy, but products also must prove themselves in a similar market, like Europe, for at least five years. The process is stringent to prevent products that disrupt hormones or cause allergic reactions from making it to market.

But the Public Access to SunScreens (PASS) Coalition, a lobbying group of sunscreen manufacturers, dermatologists and skin-cancer organizations, is pushing the FDA and Congress to streamline the approval process. And legislators are listening. Congress directed the FDA to take final action on pending ingredients by June 2014 and to develop a new process

so innovative ingredients get on the market quicker.