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Mood ring technology used to protect children from sunburn

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For Canwest News Service

It's a warm, sunny day, and there's not a cloud in the sky.

You slap sunscreen on your toddler and go for a walk in the park, but in the back of your mind you're worrying about your child's exposure to the sun.

If only, you muse, someone could invent a device that would alert you when your precious one is exposed to too much ultraviolet light.

Such musings were the kind of thing that kept three Montreal entrepreneurs awake at night until they had created and fine-tuned a little high-tech patch that they've embedded in their line of children's clothing.

Brothers Neil and Bram Miller and Murray Hersh, partners in LuvGear, are manufacturing children's wear that sports a little icon, called the Sun Alert. It changes colour when the person wearing the garment is exposed to a dangerous level of ultraviolet light.

It's one of four such products they've created. The others include Hot Alert, which measures whether bath water or baby bottles are too hot; Temp Alert, which measures whether a baby's skin is feverish; and Cold Alert, which measures whether a baby is too cold in his snowsuit.

"It's a safety device," Hersh said.

"It alerts parents or caregivers to the increasing level of UV rays, heat or cold a child is exposed to. We're telling parents that they have a potential problem that they have to take care of."

The patches (or icons) are about the size of a nickel. The Sun Alert icons are sewn onto such warm-weather garments as sun hats, bathing suits, shirts and life jackets. The Temp Alert icons are sewn into onesies, the little single-piece garments small babies wear. Snowsuits bear the Cold Alert patches and the face cloths bear the Heat Alert icons.

The patches contain a photo-sensitive and heat-sensitive ink that changes colour to alert a caregiver that the wearer is exposed to too much heat or cold.

The patented invention has garnered so much interest from retailers internationally, it's taken the partners by surprise.

"I'm still marvelling at the fact that when I call Tesco, one of the largest retailers in the world, they actually call me back," Hersh said.

What's more, Wal-Mart Canada, the first to sell the product in Canada, was sufficiently interested in the Alert series, it asked LuvGear if it could be the exclusive retailer of the product.

"We're in negotiations about it," Neil Miller said. Wal-Mart began selling the clothes about a month ago and is already reordering stock.

Marks and Spencer put the LuvGear products in its stores on April 1 and has already reordered another 500,000 pieces, Hersh said.

The partners' journey into the children's wear alert patches started about three years ago when Neil got the idea for the ink-filled disks.