

TRANSCRIPT

THURSDAY 12 JUNE 2025

Transcript: AMA Queensland President Dr Nick Yim, ABC Gold Coast, Breakfast with Tom Forbes, Thursday 12 June 2025

Subject: Choice sunscreen testing yields alarming results

TOM FORBES: Can I just ask you a question? Is applying sunscreen part of your daily regime before you leave the house? Well, consumer advocacy group Choice tested 20 popular sunscreens to see whether their sun protection factor - or SPF - claims were acceptable advertised. The results found that 16 of the 20 sunscreens failed to match their stated claims. One of the sunscreen products advertised with an SPF of 50-plus returned a rating of four. To discuss, you are joined by the Australian Medical Association Queensland President, Dr Nick Yim. Good morning, Dr Yim.

DR NICK YIM: Good morning, Tom.

TOM FORBES: First of all, your reaction to these findings by choice?

DR NICK YIM: To be honest, I think like yourself and many of the listeners, this is actually really alarming and concerning. Obviously, anything that's advertised with SPF 50, we expect those products to have an SPF 50. So this is maybe an opportunity for definitely the TGA to maybe carry out their own independent testing of these sunscreens.

TOM FORBES: Yeah, I understand that the particular sunscreen brands carry out their own testing. Is that correct?

DR NICK YIM: Yeah, so the manufacturers do carry out their own testing. But obviously, given these findings, it might be an opportunity for the TGA to do their own independent testing.

TOM FORBES: It sounds a bit like the emissions scandal with cars, you know, advertising the emissions of diesel engines and they were found to be completely wrong or higher than what they're advertised. So you mentioned the TGA should be doing the testing on this. Now, from a medical perspective, how important is sunscreen for people, especially those that spend long amounts of their time outside?

DR NICK YIM: Yeah, so it's not even just people spending long amounts of time outside in the sun. We know in Queensland we unfortunately have some of the highest rates of skin cancer, melanomas, and also VCCs, SCCs, which is the reason why sunscreen is so important. But at the same time, we need to be trusting the product that we're applying to ourselves. But it's also a friendly reminder that it's not just sunscreen, it's also using the famous word slip, slop, slap.

TOM FORBES: Yeah, and a couple of the surprising statistics for me or the results was there was three Queensland, sorry, three Cancer Council sun creams that didn't stack up as advertised. that must be a bit concerning for the Cancer Council?

DR NICK YIM: Absolutely, and I think it's something where it's really important. Having some sunscreen on is definitely a positive, but at the same time we need to be applying the right product and the product that is being advertised needs to be absolutely accurate.

TOM FORBES: On a daily basis, Doctor, how many people would come into your clinic, anecdotally, with a skin complaint or skin damage from the sun?

DR NICK YIM: So I work in Hervey Bay so it's up further north than the Gold Coast. But on a daily basis, I probably have two or three patients come in with a skin spot. And many of them are unfortunately due to skin cancers due to previous damage, previous sun exposure even before maybe sunscreen was invented. But this is an opportunity for all of us now to follow those preventive measures, such as sunscreen, wearing long-sleeved clothing, sunglasses. But the important thing is also getting those regular skin checks with your GP to detect those early skin cancers so they can be removed or checked up on earlier.

TOM FORBES: Yeah, I guess having the results of this particular choice survey should not stop people or prevent people from applying sun cream. SPF 50, Sun Protection Factor 50, one of the products came back as an SPF 4. Can you just explain what SPF actually means?

DR NICK YIM: Yeah so the SPF itself, it's a matter of, I guess, range and detection of barrier that can prevent the sun rays from going to the skin, and also how much time is needed for the skin to burn. So when it comes back as SPF 4, that is really disappointing, to be honest, especially when it is advertising at SPF 50. So this is something where we do need to have that trust in the product, but at the same time using all those other measures that we alluded to help prevent sunburn.

TOM FORBES: Dr Nick Yim is the Queensland President of the Australian Medical Association. We were talking this morning about Choice releasing a report that found 16 of the 20 sunscreens they tested failed to match their stated claims. Do you still get people coming into your clinic, Dr Yim, who don't wear sun cream for fear that it may be carcinogenic itself and they're better off being exposed to the sun than using sun cream for fear that down the track, you know, it may be found that sun cream has long-term effects?

DR NICK YIM: It's actually fortuitous that I think the education is getting out there. So what I'm seeing in my practice is more and more people are coming in to get those skin checks. At the same time, more and more people are wearing that sunscreen, and there's less people coming in who are severely sunburnt, which is great to see. Because I think many of the listeners would know one or two people, even young people now, being diagnosed with skin cancer, which is building on that awareness. So it's quite positive from a community perspective.

TOM FORBES: All right. So wrapping up, Dr Yim, you would like the Therapeutic Goods Administration to take over the testing of these sun creams for their SPF rating as opposed to letting the manufacturers do it themselves?

DR NICK YIM: I think they do really need to do some independent testing, especially on these aspects, given these findings. But I guess the big take home message here is obviously don't just rely on sunscreen to protect yourself from the sun. All those measures that we've learned from slip, slop, slap, sliding those shades, that's also important measures.

TOM FORBES: All right, Dr Yim, lovely to talk to you. Thank you very much.

DR NICK YIM: Always a pleasure. Thanks, Tom.

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