

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604

Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499

Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



PUT SUN SAFETY AHEAD OF SUN TAN - AMA

The AMA is reminding people that it is the season to be sun smart to reduce the risk of skin cancer.

AMA President, Professor Brian Owler, said that many Australians look forward to spending time at the beach or taking part in other outdoor activities over the holiday period, but it's important for people to remember to protect themselves from harmful UV exposure.

"A golden tan might sound appealing, but there is nothing attractive about sun damaged skin," Professor Owler said.

"Sun exposure that doesn't result in burning can still cause damage to skin cells and increase your risk of developing skin cancer.

"There is no safe level of tanning. Everyone, no matter what their age or skin type, needs to take care when going out in the sun."

The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that nearly one in three Australians had skin cancer in 2011-12, making it the most common type of cancer.

"Melanoma risk increases with exposure to UV radiation, particularly episodes of sunburn," Professor Owler said.

"Almost 14 per cent of adults, 24 per cent of teenagers, and eight per cent of children are sunburnt on an average summer weekend. Many people get sunburnt when they are taking part in water sports and activities at the beach or a pool, as well as gardening or having a barbecue.

"With sunburn causing 95 per cent of melanomas, the most deadly form of skin cancer, Australians need to remember to slip on some sun-protective clothing, slop on water-resistant sunscreen, slap on a hat, seek shade, and slide on some sunglasses."

"Prevention is better than treatment."

AMA NSW President, Dr Saxon Smith, a dermatologist whose practice is on the sun-soaked Central Coast of NSW, earlier this month told an international skin cancer conference that Australians should be wearing sun screen every day of the year, not just in summer.

"The sun does not discriminate based on the purpose that people go outside for, be it a visit to the beach or walking to work," Dr Smith said.

"All accumulated UV exposure contributes to a person's lifetime risk of skin cancer.

"From my experience with patients, many people who wear sunscreen do not always adhere to the safety guidelines.

"They do not reapply sunscreen every two hours, and they do not check the use-by date of their sunscreens.

"It is important to buy new sunscreen every summer," Dr Smith said.

Background

- Every year, in Australia:
 - skin cancers account for around 80 per cent of all newly diagnosed cancers;
 - between 95 and 99 per cent of skin cancers are caused by exposure to the sun;
 - GPs have over 1 million patient consultations per year for skin cancer; and
 - the incidence of skin cancer is one of the highest in the world, two to three times the rates in Canada, the US, and the UK.
- In 2008, Australia had the world's highest age-standardised incidence rate of melanoma of the skin (37 per 100,000), which was more than 12 times the average world rate (3 per 100,000).
- Two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer by the time they are 70.
- The majority of skin cancers in Australia are caused by exposure to UV radiation in sunlight.
- Excessive exposure to the ultraviolet rays of the sun is a risk factor for some cancers. The risk of sunlight is highest for people who have fair skin, blond or red hair, freckles, and/or a tendency to burn easily. Sunlight is a risk factor for:
 - melanoma of the skin; and
 - non-melanoma skin cancer.
- Sunburn is also common on cooler or overcast days as many people mistakenly believe UV radiation is not as strong. This is untrue – you can still be sunburnt when the temperature is cool.
- Cancer Council Australia explains that people need to apply sunscreen liberally. This means applying at least a teaspoon for each limb, front and back of the body and half a teaspoon for the face, neck and ears. Most people don't apply enough sunscreen resulting in only 50-80 per cent of the protection stated on the product.
- For best protection, the Cancer Council recommends a combination of sun protection measures:
 - slip on some sun-protective clothing – that covers as much skin as possible;
 - slop on broad spectrum, water resistant SPF30+ sunscreen. Put it on 20 minutes before you go outdoors and every two hours afterwards. Sunscreen should never be used to extend the time you spend in the sun;
 - slap on a hat – that protects your face, head, neck, and ears;
 - seek shade; and
 - slide on some sunglasses – make sure they meet Australian Standards.

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CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
 Kirsty Waterford 02 6270 5464 / 0427 209 753

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