



MEDIA RELEASE

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Almost half of Australians confused about sunscreen

New Cancer Council research released today (20 October) shows that Australians are becoming increasingly misinformed about sunscreen, prompting skin cancer prevention experts to bust common sunscreen myths and remind Australians to slip, slop, slap, seek (shade) and slide (on sunglasses).

The latest stats from Cancer Council's National Sun Protection Survey, to be presented at the World Congress of Melanoma in Brisbane today, show that only 55 percent of Australian adults recognise that it's safe to use sunscreen every day, down from 61 percent in 2014.

17 percent of respondents were worried that sunscreens contain ingredients that are bad for your health, while separately 20 percent believed that using sunscreen regularly would result in not having enough vitamin D.

Craig Sinclair, Chair, Public Health Committee, Cancer Council Australia said that he is very concerned that too many Australians are not trusting sunscreen at a time when the evidence is stronger than ever that it is safe and effective and can reduce skin cancer risk.

"Two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer in their lifetime. Sunscreen has been proven to prevent skin cancer, including the most deadly type – melanoma. With an alarming number of Australians believing myths about sunscreen, it's time to bust the myths and get the right information out there about sun protection."

"Sunscreens in Australia are strictly regulated by the Therapeutics Goods Administration to ensure that the ingredients they contain are safe and effective. Australians should be confident that they can use sunscreen on a daily basis – there is no evidence to suggest the ingredients are bad for your health.

"Several studies have shown that sunscreen use in real life has minimal impact on Vitamin D levels over time. In summer most of us get enough Vitamin D through incidental sun exposure – deliberate excess sun exposure, even for those with Vitamin D deficiency, is never recommended.

"The biggest concern when it comes to sunscreen is that Australians aren't applying it correctly and are getting sunburnt as a result. Other studies show that 85 percent of Australians don't apply enough sunscreen. We also know many don't apply sunscreen 20 minutes before heading outdoors or don't regularly reapply every two hours.

"Sunscreen offers the best protection from damaging UV when used alongside protective clothing, hats, shade and sunglasses. When applying sunscreen you need at least one teaspoon per limb, one for the front of the body, one for the back, one for the head. A full body application should be around 35ml, or seven teaspoons. It's more than Australians think."

Associate Professor Stephen Shumack from the Australasian College of Dermatologists stressed that sensitivities to sunscreen are very rare.

"A small number of Australians may experience sunscreen sensitivities that require follow-up with a health professional. Young babies in particular have sensitive skin – that's why we don't generally recommend widespread use of sunscreen in the first six months of life.

"The primary forms of sun protection should always be protective clothing, hats, shade and sunglasses for babies and children of any age. For older children, sunscreen can be used on the parts of the body not covered by clothing.

"If you do believe you have had a reaction, discontinue use and see a health professional who can help you identify the ingredient you are sensitive to. This will most likely be the fragrance or the preservative in the cream base."

ENDS

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National Sun Survey Results

- 55% of adults agreed that sunscreen can be used safely on a daily basis – down from 61% in 2013/14.
- 20% of adults agreed that people who use sunscreen regularly when outdoors don't get enough Vitamin D from the sun.
- 17% of adults agreed that ingredients in sunscreen are bad for health if used regularly.

About the National Sun Protection Survey

The National Sun Protection Survey is conducted every three to four years by Cancer Council. The 2016-17 survey collected responses from 3,614 adults aged 18-69 years on topics including solariums, tanning, sun protection behaviours and sunburn on summer weekend

Cancer Council Australia's Top Sunscreen Myths Busted

Myth 1: Sunscreen shouldn't be used on a daily basis as it's not safe

FALSE: Sunscreen and sunscreen ingredients are strictly regulated by the TGA to ensure it is safe and effective. It can be worn on a daily basis without harming your health and should be used alongside other forms of sun protection, whenever UV levels are 3 or above.

Myth 2: Using sunscreen will stop you getting enough vitamin D

FALSE: A number of studies have shown that sunscreen use in real life has minimal impact on Vitamin D levels. In summer, most Australians get enough Vitamin D through incidental sun exposure – for instance while walking to the shops at lunch. Even those who are Vitamin D deficient shouldn't sunbake or skip sun protection.

Myth 3: If you have a good sunscreen it's enough to protect you from the sun

FALSE: Sunscreen should always be used in conjunction with protective clothing, seeking shade, a broadbrim hat and sunglasses. Sunscreen is not a suit of armour and shouldn't be used to extend your time in the sun.

Myth 4: Using a water resistant SPF50+ means you can stay in the sun longer without having to reapply

FALSE: Any sunscreen should be reapplied every two hours, or after swimming, sweating or towel drying, regardless of the level of water resistance advised on the bottle.

Myth 5: You only need a little bit of SPF50+ to be protected

FALSE: To get the correct level of SPF you need to apply the right amount of sunscreen. This should be at least one teaspoon per limb, one for the front of the torso, one for the back, and one for the head. This is seven teaspoons (or 35ml) in total.