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Concerning new data shows almost half of Australians aren't using adequate sun protection

As the weather warms up and UV levels rise, Cancer Council is concerned that Australians are not using adequate sun protection to reduce their risk of skin cancer, with new data revealing that only half (53.9%) of Australians are using three or more forms of sun protection when exposed to the sun during peak UV times.

[The new Australian first survey](#), funded by the Cancer Councils of Australia and conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), examined the sun protective behaviours of more than 8500 Australians during November 2023 and February 2024.

It found that over 2 million Australians attempted to get a suntan in the last year, and almost 1.5 million Australians had been sunburned in the week before being surveyed.

Young Australians aged 15-24 years were the most at risk as they were less likely to use adequate sun protection when outdoors during peak UV times (39.4%), compared to those aged 45-54 years (61.6%). The survey also found that one in five (20.6%) young Australians tried to get a suntan in the last year, with more young women (26%) doing so than young men (15.3%).

Only two in five (38.1%) Australians used sunscreen on most days during late spring and summer when daily sunscreen use is recommended. Men were less likely to use sunscreen regularly (27%), around half of the number of women (50.7%). Men were also more likely to be outside during peak UV times (64.8%), than women (56.6%).

Often called our 'national cancer', Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world, with almost 19,000 Australians estimated to be diagnosed with melanoma this year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).

Professor Anne Cust, Chair of Cancer Council's National Skin Cancer Committee, says this new data reinforces Australians are not doing enough to protect themselves in summer.

"It's encouraging to see half of Australians are using three or more forms of sun protection. However, the research indicates that many Australians still aren't being safe in the sun when they're out and about. We want people to make sun protection a part of their daily routine, so that they're protected from incidental sun exposure.

"Overexposure to UV radiation from the sun is the greatest risk factor for skin cancer, and we know that sun exposure and skin damage is cumulative, leading to a higher risk of skin cancer later in life. However, it's never too late to prevent further damage.

"That's why we need to remind all Australians of the simple steps they can take to reduce their skin cancer risk every day."

Adjunct Associate Professor Craig Sinclair, Director of the World Health Organisation Collaborative Centre for UV Radiation from Cancer Council Victoria, says the data shows that it's important all Australians, particularly young people, incorporate sun protective measures into their routines to reduce their risk of developing skin cancer.

“Just 15 minutes of UV exposure can cause skin damage such as a suntan, increasing your risk of skin cancer later in life. That's why the younger Australians need to protect themselves now to prevent skin cancer in the future.

“If we can encourage daily sun protection habits with young Australians, it will greatly reduce the impact of skin cancer for future generations.”

Sadly, skin cancer claims the lives of over 2,000 Australians every year. However, there are steps we can take to protect ourselves from the sun and reduce our risk of skin cancer.

Cancer Council is reminding Australians to use [all five forms of sun protection](#) when the UV is three or above: Slip on protective clothing, Slop on broad-spectrum, water-resistant SPF 50 or SPF 50+ sunscreen, Slap on a broad-brimmed hat, Seek shade and Slide in sunglasses.

-ENDS-

About the data

[The Sun Protection Behaviours survey](#) was a telephone interview of 8,595 people across Australia aged 15 years and over who were usual residents of private dwellings. Data collection occurred between November 2023 and February 2024. Unless otherwise stated, all analysis refers to people aged 15 years and over. The UV levels and weather conditions, which influence sunburn and sun protection behaviours, vary across Australia. Therefore, results should be considered in the context of the local UV levels and weather. The Sun Protection Behaviours survey was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and funded by the Cancer Councils of Australia.

Contact details

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About Cancer Council Australia

Cancer Council Australia is Australia's leading cancer charity, working to reduce the impact of cancer for all Australians. Cancer Council Australia works with its members, the eight state and territory Cancer Councils to:

- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer
- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice

Find out more at cancer.org.au, or visit our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).