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Cancer Council stresses importance of improved understanding as UV reaches extreme levels this summer

New data shows only one in six Australians have strong understanding of the UV Index

Cancer Council and the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) are highlighting concerning new data that shows only one in six of all Australians have a strong understanding of the UV Index.

New data from YouGov found that 63% Australians are concerned about developing or redeveloping skin cancer in their lifetime but only one in six people (16%, the equivalent of just 3.4 million people) know how to interpret the UV Index and how to act accordingly.

A crucial tool in our sun protection routines, the UV Index measures ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which is known to cause most skin cancers. The higher the number, the higher the hazard. When the UV Index reaches 3 or above, it's time to 'Slip, Slop, Slap, Seek and Slide.'

In Australia the UV Index is at its most damaging in January when average values are forecast to be 11 or more across most of the country on clear sky days.

Despite the known risk, the survey results showed nearly two-thirds (63%) of Australians are concerned about developing or redeveloping skin cancer in their lifetime. This highlights the need for Australians to understand and use the UV Index to reduce their UV exposure, protect their skin and prevent future skin cancers.

Two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer in their lifetime and 2,000 Australians die of skin cancer every year.

Sally Blane, Chair of Cancer Council's National Skin Cancer Committee, says, "UV radiation is an invisible killer. Yet only about a third of those surveyed (37%) admit only having a basic understanding of what the UV Index measures, and a further one in ten people (12%, the equivalent of 2.6 million people), admit they have limited or no knowledge about it.

"Cancer Council is encouraging all Australians to get familiar with the UV Index and make checking it a part of their daily sun protection routine. The UV Index always peaks in the middle of the day, and unprotected skin can be damaged in as little as 15 minutes at this time of year. The key takeaway is to use all five forms of sun protection when heading outside and the UV Index is 3 or above.

"Australia has some of the highest levels of UV radiation in the world, with overexposure to UV radiation linked to up to 95% of melanomas. That's why it's essential that we all Slip on sun protective clothing, Slop on SPF50 or SPF50+ sunscreen, Slap on a broad brimmed hat, Seek shade and Slide on sunglasses whenever the UV is 3 or above."

Sean Hewson, UV Research Scientist at ARPANSA says “At ARPANSA, we maintain a network of UV detectors to monitor ultraviolet radiation across Australia and its potential to harm our skin. Australians can easily access live UV Index measurements on our website to check UV intensity in real time. Our live measurements account for geographic location, altitude, time of day, time of year and cloud cover which is important as levels are higher in some parts of Australia than others.

“The UV Index should be used every day even on cool or overcast days as UV radiation can still be high in these conditions, and clear skies or high temperatures cannot be relied on to determine when sun protection is needed.”

Use the free [SunSmart Global UV app](#) or the [ARPANSA](#) website to see what the UV Index is near you.

Whenever the UV is 3 or above use all 5 forms of sun protection – Slip on sun protective clothing, Slop on SPF50 or SPF50+ sunscreen, Slap on a broad brimmed hat, Seek shade and Slide on sunglasses.

-ENDS-

Note to editor:

The UV Index can be divided into the following levels:

Low 1-2

Moderate 3-5, sun protection to be used when the index reaches 3 or above.

High 6-7

Very high 8-10

Extreme 11 and above

It's easy to access the UV Index through checking on the free [SunSmart Global UV app](#) and the [ARPANSA](#) website to check the UV levels near you.

About the Research

The research was conducted online by YouGov between 16 and 20 October 2025. The sample consisted of 1,035 Australian adults aged 18+. Data was weighted to be representative of all Australian adults based on the latest ABS population estimates.

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](#).

About ARPANSA

ARPANSA is the Australian Government's primary authority on radiation protection and nuclear safety.

ARPANSA protects the people and the environment from the harmful effects of radiation through research, policy, advice, codes, standards, services, and the regulation of Commonwealth entities that use or produce radiation.

ARPANSA contributes to the development of sun protection standards, undertakes research, provides sun protection testing services, maintains the national UV monitoring network and works with organisations such as the Cancer Councils of Australia to promote sun protection.

Find out more at arpansa.gov.au, or visit our [Facebook](#) or [LinkedIn](#).