

MEDIA RELEASE

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Slip, slop, slack leaves Australians red-faced

National Skin Cancer Action Week puts the spotlight on sun protection

Cancer Council research released today (20/11) shows fewer Australians are using hats to protect themselves from the sun and, as a result, are getting sunburnt on their face, head, nose or ears.

The data from Cancer Council's National Sun Protection Survey reveals that just 44 percent of Australian adults wear a hat when exposed to UV on summer weekends, down from 48 percent in 2003.

Australian adults' use of clothing to protect their skin also decreased and their tendency to seek shade during peak UV times showed no improvement. However, there was also good news, with the survey showing that Australian's use of sunscreen has increased.

In light of the findings, Cancer Council and the Australasian College of Dermatologists have come together during National Skin Cancer Action week (20-26 November) to remind Australians to be SunSmart by following Cancer Council's five important steps to sun protection: slip, slop, slap, seek and slide.

CEO of Cancer Council Australia, Professor Sanchia Aranda, says the results show too few Australians are remembering to use a combination of sun protection measures.

"A four percent drop in hat usage may sound small, but any downward trend is a concern. This latest data shows that over 640,000 Australians have stopped wearing a hat to protect themselves when exposed to UV on weekends and in total almost 10.6 million Australians don't wear a hat when out in the sun on summer weekends."

"Only 1 in 5 adults used three or more sun protection measures during summer, which is a real worry given the prevalence of skin cancer in Australia.

"There can be a tendency from many Australians to slop on some sunscreen and think they are protected all day long. But sunscreen isn't a suit of armour. It should be your last line of defence – a hat, clothing, sunglasses and shade are also key to protecting your skin," Professor Aranda said.

The data also showed some worrying trends indicating that the lack of broadbrim hats and clothing was translating to the places on the body where Australians are sunburnt.

"The research shows that the face, head, nose, or ears are the most common places on the body that Australians get sunburnt, alongside the arms and hands," Professor Aranda said.

"There's no doubt that by neglecting to slap on a broadbrim hat Aussies are putting themselves at risk of a potentially deadly skin cancer."

Australasian College of Dermatologists' President, Associate Professor Chris Baker, said that dermatologists regularly treated skin cancers that could have been easily prevented through proper sun protection.

"Dermatologists see a lot of skin cancers on the face, ears, head and neck" Associate Professor Baker said.



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“These skin cancers are particularly concerning because they can arise quickly and are more difficult to treat. Surgery is the most common treatment, with visible scarring often unavoidable. Other treatments include topical therapy for some early skin cancers through to radiotherapy and chemotherapy for more advanced cancers. Sadly we don’t always get them in time.”

He also urged Australians to keep a close eye on their skin, know what normal spots they have and to keep a watch for any changes.

“It’s important to remember that skin cancer can be prevented and, if detected early, can often be successfully treated. If you notice any changes in size, shape or colour of an existing spot, or the development of a new spot, you should get it checked as soon as possible.”

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For media interviews please contact Hollie Jenkins – hollie.jenkins@cancer.org.au or 0400 762 010

About the National Sun Protection Survey

The National Sun Protection Survey was conducted via phone over the summer of 2013-14. A total of 6,349 Australians were interviewed. Conducted every three to four years by Cancer Council, the survey provides a perspective on changing trends in Australians’ sun protection behaviours and rates of sunburn over the past decade.

Sun protection used/worn during respondent’s main activity outdoors in peak UVR hours on the weekend (adjusted prevalence, based on models adjusting for weekend weather conditions)	2003-04	2013-14
Head wear (hat, cap or visor)	48	44
Sunscreen	33	37
¾ length or long-sleeved top	18	19
¾ length or long leg-cover	46	39
Sunglasses	55	61
Was mostly in the shade	27	28
Three or more sun protective behaviours	16	21

Distribution of sunburn on the body, incidence of parts of sunburn on weekend among sunburn adults (% prevalence)	2014 adults	2014 sunburnt male	2014 sunburnt females
Face, head, nose or ear	41	48	32
Arms or hands	41	43	38
Legs, knees or feet	12	13	10
Chest, stomach or back (trunk)	18	14	24
Neck	27	32	20
Shoulders	27	19	40

About National Skin Cancer Action Week

Each year Cancer Council Australia and the Australasian College of Dermatologists come together for National Skin Cancer Action Week.

With two in three Australians diagnosed with skin cancer by age 70, the week is a time when we remind Australians of the importance of sun protection and early skin cancer detection.

More than 2000 people in Australia die from skin cancer each year and Cancer Council estimates that Australia spends more than \$1 billion per year treating skin cancer, with costs increasing substantially over the past few years.



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Yet most skin cancers can be prevented by the use of good sun protection.

National Skin Cancer Action Week is a great time to remind people to slip on sun-protective clothing, slop on SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen, slap on a broad-brimmed hat, seek shade and slide on sunglasses.

The theme of this year is "My #SunSmart5". Cancer Council and the Australasian College of Dermatologists are encouraging Australians to use all five forms of sun protection and share photos of themselves being SunSmart on social media.