Being SunSmart

The Cancer Council South Australia

Skin cancer in Australia

Australia has the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. One in every two Australians will develop some form of skin cancer during their lives.

There are over 380,000 Australians diagnosed with skin cancer every year and over 1500 people die.

Most skin cancers are caused from over exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation in sunlight.

Most skin cancers can be prevented if everyone protected their skin from the sun.

Finding skin cancer early gives the best chance of successful treatment.

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation levels in Australia are very strong and cause permanent damage to your skin – over time it thickens, wrinkles, sags and becomes leathery. This damage increases your risk of skin cancer.

A suntan or sunburn may fade but the damage lasts a lifetime.

What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer is a type of cancer that develops in skin cells. There are three types of skin cancer - basal cell carcinoma (**BCC**), squamous cell carcinoma (**SCC**) and **melanoma**.

BCC is the most common skin cancer, about 75% of skin cancer diagnosed are BCC's. It looks like a lump or dry scaly area that may be red, pale or pearly in colour.

A BCC grows slowly and usually appears on the head, neck and upper body.

SCC grow over some months and make up about 20% of all skin cancers. It looks like a thickened, red scaly spot that may bleed easily, crust or ulcerate. SCC's usually appear on skin most often exposed to the sun.

Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Although only 5 % of all skin cancers diagnosed are melanoma, they cause 80% of deaths. Melanoma appears as a new spot or an existing spot that changes colour, shape or size. It can spread to other parts of the body if not detected early and treated. Melanoma can appear on skin not normally exposed to the sun.

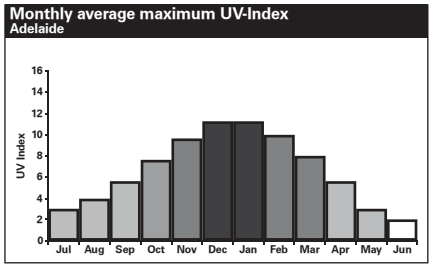
If you are concerned about a spot on your skin it is important to see your doctor as soon as possible.

What causes skin cancer?

Sunlight is made up of light, heat and UV radiation. Over exposure to UV radiation in sunlight damages the skin, causing it to darken, burn or even blister. Your skin cancer risk increases as skin damage builds up every year. The number of severe sunburns you have received, especially during childhood, increases your risk too.

The higher the UV radiation levels, the less time it takes for skin damage to occur.

UV radiation is strongest during the months that the sun is directly overhead. In South Australia, from August to May, UV levels range from moderate to extreme every day.



Source: Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA)

UV radiation levels are strongest over the middle hours of the day (10 am to 3 pm) – however in some months are also strong enough outside of these hours to cause skin damage.

The strength of UV radiation is reported on the UV Index. UV radiation levels are divided into low (1–2), moderate (3–5), high (6–7), very high (8–10) and extreme (11 and above).

A UV Index level of 3 is high enough to cause skin damage – so it's important to protect your skin when the UV radiation level is 3 and above.

UV radiation cannot be seen or felt. The outside air temperature does not affect the UV level. Skin damage can still occur on cool and cloudy days.

Why is sun protection important?

No matter what your skin type or colour, everyone is at risk of developing skin cancer. Children in particular need to be protected from the sun as their skin will be damaged much quicker than an adult.

How do I protect my skin?

Protecting your skin from the sun when the UV radiation level is 3 or above is simple.

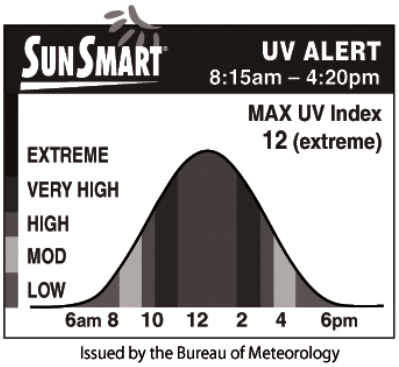
- When you're outside, stay in the shade.
- Wear clothes that cover most of your skin – long sleeved shirts with a collar and long pants/skirt are best.
- Wear a hat that gives your face, ears and neck lots of shade – a bucket hat, legionnaire or broad brimmed hat are best.
- Wear a pair of wrap around sunglasses to protect your eyes – look for a pair that meets the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067:2003.
- Use a SPF 30+ broad spectrum sunscreen on any skin that can't be covered with clothing and reapply it regularly.

How do I know when the UV index is 3 and above?

The Bureau of Meteorology predict the UV levels with the weather forecast every day and produce the SunSmart UV Alert. It shows the times during the day (ie 9:35 am – 4:12pm) that the UV radiation levels are 3 and above – so that's when you need to protect your skin. It's a really useful tool for anyone planning outdoor activities.

Look for the SunSmart UV Alert on the weather page of the daily newspaper or log on to *www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv.*

If you want to find out what the UV level is in Australian capital cities at any time of the day, go to the ARPANSA website *www.arpansa.gov.au/uvindex/realtime/ausrealtime.htm.* This is particularly helpful during spring and autumn, when it's hard to tell what the UV level may be.



Issued by the Bureau of Meteorology

Use shade as much as possible when you're outside

Shade is an important way to protect your skin from the sun. Shade from trees and man made structures (pergolas, buildings) provide skin protection – but don't totally block out UV radiation. Even under dense shade UV radiation can be reflected off the ground and buildings around you. Always use shade as well as clothes, hats and sunscreen for maximum protection from UV radiation.

Wear clothes that cover your skin

Clothes should cover as much skin as possible. Shirts with collars and long sleeves and long trousers or skirts give the most protection.

Look for clothing made of a closely woven material. The tighter the weave of the material the better the protection from UV radiation. Darker colours give slightly more protection than lighter colours but can be hotter to wear during warmer weather.

Some clothes are labelled with an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF). The UPF number is a guide to how much protection the fabric provides from UV radiation – look for a UPF 50+ for maximum protection.

Remember your clothes need to cover as much of your skin as possible so look at the style as well as the fabric it's made from.

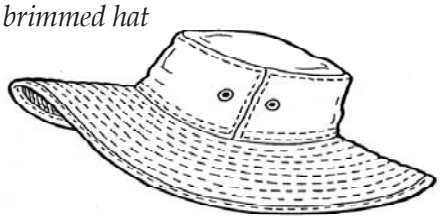
Wear a hat that provides your face, neck and ears with plenty of shade

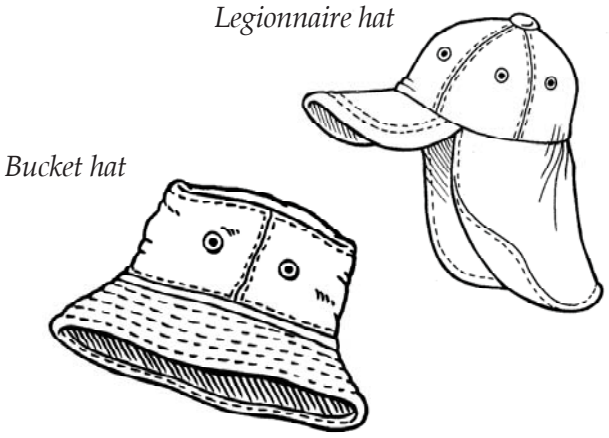
Common sites for skin cancers are the scalp, neck, face and ears so hats should provide good shade to these areas.

The Cancer Council recommends 3 styles of hats for good protection.

- A broad brimmed hat with a brim width of at least 7.5 cm
- A legionnaire style hat where the back flap meets the side of the front peak
- A bucket hat with a deep crown that sits low on the head and has an angled brim which is at least 6 cm wide.

Broad brimmed hat





Wear wrap around sunglasses

Eye damage from exposure to UV radiation includes degenerative changes, cataracts and pterygia. Cataracts cloud the lens of the eye and are one of the most common types of eye damage in Australia – mostly due to sun exposure. Untreated cataracts can lead to blindness.

Sunglasses are rated with an Eye Protection Factor (EPF) from 1–10. Sunglasses labelled EPF 10 provide 100% UV protection. Sunglasses sold in Australia must meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067:2003.

Choose sunglasses that don't let light in around the frames, especially at the sides, and make sure the frames fit close to the face.

All sunglasses must have a protection category label. Look for category 2, 3 or 4 and/or a lens description that states "good UV protection". Category 0 and 1 are fashion glasses and provide only some UV protection.

Apply SPF 30+ broad spectrum sunscreen

Sunscreen should always be used with other forms of skin protection.

Sunscreens contain chemicals that either absorb or reflect UV radiation before it damages the skin.

SPF 30+ sunscreens filter out about 97% of UV rays. Those labelled BROAD SPECTRUM filter both UVB and UVA radiation.

The Sun Protection Factor (SPF) label on a sunscreen is only a guide to the strength of the product – not how much time you can safely spend in the sun.

Always apply sunscreen liberally to clean dry skin 20 minutes before going outside. Use at least a teaspoonful for each arm and leg and ½ teaspoonful for your face, neck and ears. Put it on again every two hours or more regularly if you are perspiring or involved in water activities.

You don't need to rub sunscreen into your skin until it disappears. The cream will be absorbed into your skin over the 20 minutes before you go out into the sun.

No sunscreen – even if it's reapplied regularly - offers complete protection against UV radiation. A small amount of UV radiation still reaches the skin.

Vitamin D and sun protection

We need vitamin D to develop strong healthy bones. The best form of vitamin D for your body is the UV radiation in sunlight.

Sensible sun protection does not put people at risk of vitamin D deficiency but there are times when it's actually important to be in the sun without protection.

- Fair skinned people can maintain adequate vitamin D levels in summer from a few minutes of sunlight on their face, arms and hands before 10 am or after 3 pm on most days of the week.
- In winter in South Australia, when UV radiation levels are below 3, people need about 2–3 hours of sunlight to their face, arms and hands over a week.

Although most people get enough sunlight to make adequate vitamin D during their day-to-day outdoor activities there are some groups who may not make enough. Naturally dark skinned people, those who cover their skin for religious or cultural reasons, the elderly, babies of vitamin D deficient mothers and people who are housebound or are in institutional care are at a higher risk of vitamin D deficiency.

People concerned about their vitamin D levels should see their doctor.

Checking for skin cancer

Finding skin cancer early gives you the best chance of successful treatment.

It's important to check the skin all over your body regularly – we suggest every three months.

Look for new spots or existing spots that start to change in colour, shape or size. A skin cancer could also be a spot that bleeds easily, never really heals or is always itchy.

Make an appointment to see your doctor if you notice any of these changes or if you are unsure about any spots you have.

What do I do if I think I have a skin cancer?

Make an appointment to see your doctor if you notice any of these changes. Almost all skin cancers can be treated if found early.

Don't ignore a strange looking spot – it could be dangerous. Skin cancers can continue to grow if they're not treated.

Your doctor can diagnose a skin cancer and, depending on the type of cancer, may be able to treat it as well. You may also be referred to a dermatologist or surgeon for further advice and treatment.

Skin cancer clinics

The Cancer Council South Australia does not endorse or operate skin clinics. We suggest you see your own doctor as they have your medical history and can offer follow up treatment.

Skin clinics offer a variety of services and fee arrangements. Before attending a skin clinic it is important to find out about the services offered and expertise of the staff.

To find out more about sun protection or skin cancer, see your doctor or call **The Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20.**

For more information

The Cancer Council Australia
www.cancer.org.au/content.cfm?randid=906824

Australasian College of Dermatology
www.dermcoll.asn.au

Bureau of Meteorology
www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv

Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA)
www.arpansa.gov.au/uvindex/realtime/ausrealtime.htm
www.arpansa.gov.au

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When the UV radiation level is 3 and above

Use a combination of sun protection measures to keep you safe from UV radiation - never rely on just one.

And remember, to take extra care between 10 am to 3 pm when UV Index levels reach their peak.

The Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

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