

## Being SunSmart in Canberra

*Australia has amongst the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Each year over 1700 Australians die from skin cancer. The good news is that most skin cancer can be prevented.*

Cancer Council ACT recommends everybody take five simple steps to protect their skin against sun damage when the UV levels reach 3 and above (see Daily SunSmart UV Alert).

1. Slip on some sun-protective clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
2. Slop on SPF30+ sunscreen – make sure it is broad spectrum and water resistant.  
Put it on 20 minutes before you go outdoors and reapply every two hours afterwards.  
Sunscreen should never be used to extend the time you spend in the sun.
3. Slap on a hat – that protects your face, head, neck and ears.
4. Seek shade.
5. Slide on some sunglasses – make sure they meet Australian Standards 1067.

Sun protection is recommended in Canberra from the beginning of August through to the end of May for part of or most of each day. Remember, extra care should always be taken between 10 am and 3 pm when UV Index levels reach their daily peak, especially during the daylight saving period of the year.

### Skin cancer risk

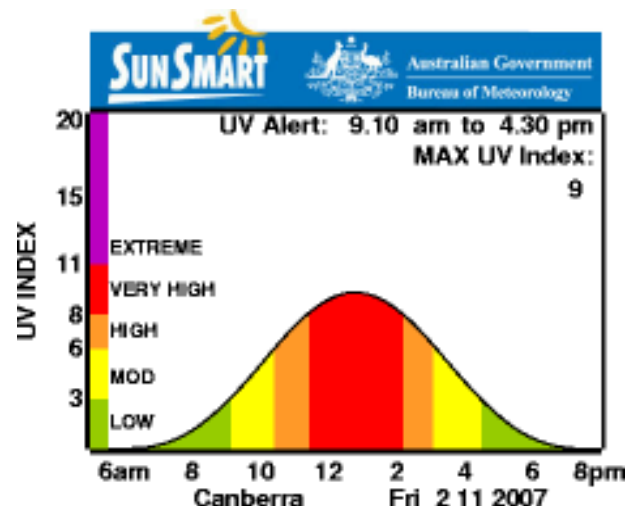
People of all ages are at risk of skin cancer. The risk increases as you get older because older people have generally had more sun exposure than younger people. The most serious form of skin cancer, melanoma, is strongly related to bursts of sun exposure. However, the total amount of sun exposure over a lifetime is also important<sup>1</sup>.

The good news is that most skin cancers can be prevented by adopting appropriate sun protection behaviour. Skin cancer can also almost always be cured if detected early. Australian survival rates from melanoma are generally higher than in other countries because we are more aware of the signs of skin cancer and detect them earlier.

### How do you know when to be SunSmart?

Whenever ultraviolet (UV) radiation levels reach 3 (moderate) **and above** sun protection is required<sup>2</sup>. At that level UV radiation can damage unprotected skin and lead to skin cancer. In the ACT from August to May, UV radiation levels reach 3 and above for part of or most of the day. Particular care should always be taken between 10 am and 2 pm (this includes minimising time outdoors as much as reasonably practicable between 11 am to 3 pm daylight saving time) when UV levels are at their highest.

The SunSmart UV Alert is issued by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) when the UV Index is forecast to reach **3 and above** a signal that sun protection is needed. It is reported in most daily newspapers and some television and radio weather forecasts across Australia. The Bureau of Meteorology website also provides the SunSmart UV Alert for over 200 locations across Australia.



Visit [www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv](http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv)  
(Sample of SunSmart UV Alert)

### Protecting yourself from UV radiation

To protect against skin damage and skin cancer when the UV Index level reaches **3 and above**, use a combination of these five sun protection measures:

1. Slip on some sun protective clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
2. Slop on SPF30+ sunscreen: make sure it is broad spectrum and water resistant. Put it on 20 minutes before you go outdoors and every two hours afterwards. Sunscreen should never be used to extend the time you spend in the sun.
3. Slap on a hat that protects your face, head, neck and ears.
4. Seek shade.
5. Slide on some sunglasses: make sure they meet Australian Standard 1067.

In June and July, UV Index levels in the ACT are low (below 3)<sup>3</sup>. Therefore sun protection is not usually necessary during these months unless you are in alpine regions or near highly reflective surfaces such as snow or water. During June and July Canberrans may need two to three hours of sunlight to the face, arms and hands, or equivalent area of skin, spread over a week to maintain adequate vitamin D levels<sup>10</sup>.

### Skin cancer in Australia

- Skin cancer treatment in Australia costs around \$300 million each year<sup>4</sup>.
- In 2001, skin cancers accounted for around 81% of all cancers diagnosed in Australia<sup>5</sup>.
- Melanoma rates in Australia are around four times as high as in Canada, the US and the UK<sup>5</sup>.
- Melanoma is the third most common cancer in women and men<sup>5</sup>.
- In young people aged 12-24 years, melanoma is the most common diagnosed cancer<sup>9</sup>. In those aged 15-44 years, melanoma and breast cancer are the most common cancers<sup>5</sup>.

### Sunburn

In Australia, sunburn can occur in as little as 15 minutes on a fine January day<sup>3,6</sup>. The most likely place on the body for adults to get sunburnt is the arms and hands, then the head and neck. The least likely body parts for sunburn are the legs and feet<sup>7</sup>.

UV radiation can be very high even on cool or cloudy days, when we least expect to get burnt.

UV radiation cannot be seen or felt. It is not hot (the heat you feel comes from infrared radiation).

All types of sunburn, whether serious or mild, can cause permanent and irreversible skin damage and can lay the

groundwork for skin cancer to develop later in life. Further sunburn only increases your risk of skin cancer<sup>8</sup>. There is no such thing as a healthy tan!

### Further information and resources

For further information and advice visit our website at [www.actcancer.org](http://www.actcancer.org) or contact the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

*UV protective clothing and accessories can be purchased at The Cancer Council ACT's shop in Fairbairn or online at [www.actcancer.org](http://www.actcancer.org).*

### This information can be photocopied for distribution.

#### References

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- 3 Samanek AJ et al. Estimates of beneficial and harmful sun exposure times during the year for major Australian population centres. *Med J Aust* 2006; 184(7): 338-41.
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- 6 Roy CR, Gies P. Ozone depletion and its calculation effect on solar UVB radiation levels for some Australian cities. In: *Health Effects of Ozone Layer Depletion, Report of the NHMRC*. Canberra: NHMRC, 1989.
- 7 The Cancer Council Australia. *National Sun Survey*. Sydney: TCCA, 2004.
- 8 Armstrong BK. How sun exposure causes skin cancer: an epidemiological perspective. In: Hill D, Elwood JM, English DR, eds. *Prevention of Skin Cancer*. The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004: 89-116.
- 9 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). *Young Australians: Their health and wellbeing 2007* Canberra: AIHW, 2007.
10. How much sun is enough? Getting the balance right Vitamin D and Sun Exposure Brochure (2008). ACOD, ANZBMS, OA and CCA.

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