

NEW GUIDELINE WARNINGS: SUNSCREEN IS NOT A SUIT OF ARMOUR

Following concerns Australians are not properly preparing themselves for activities in the sun, the Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD) and Cancer Council have updated public guidelines for sunscreen and sun protection for babies.

For the best protection, Cancer Council recommends covering clothing, a broad-brim hat, shade, sunglasses and sunscreen when the UV (ultraviolet) index reaches three or above. However, many Australians only use sunscreen to protect their skin and by not using these correctly they are putting themselves at risk.

Dr Andrew Miller, President of the ACD says: “There is a lack of understanding about the proper use of sunscreen and an over reliance on this as the principal form of sun protection. To be properly protected from UV, all five forms of sun protection should be used: slip on clothing, slop on sunscreen, slap on a hat, seek shade and slide on sunglasses.”

To maximise its effectiveness, sunscreen must also be used correctly. This means:

- Applying at least 20 minutes before going outside
- Using an adequate amount – at least one teaspoon for each arm and leg, front and back of torso and face (including neck and ears). This is a total of seven teaspoons (at least 35 ml of sunscreen) for an adult’s full body application
- Reapplying after swimming, sweating or towel drying, and/or every two hours regardless of what the label says.

Heather Walker, Chair of Cancer Council Australia’s National Skin Cancer Committee, says: “Recent research shows that 85% of people don’t apply sunscreen correctly. Sunscreen is not a suit of armour, so it is important to never rely on just sunscreen to protect the skin. Cancer Council recommend using a water resistant, broad spectrum, SPF 30+ or higher sunscreen along with other forms of sun protection.”

It is recommended that babies under 12 months are kept away from direct sunlight when UV levels reach three or above. If spending longer periods of time outdoors during low UV periods, make sure that your baby is wrapped or dressed in clothing that covers as much skin as possible, wears a hat and is kept in the shade. Sunscreen is not generally recommended for babies under six months as their skin is so sensitive.

Dr Miller says: “By using a combination of sun protection measures, Australians can take positive steps to reduce their risk of skin cancer and still enjoy our summer holiday period. Being Sun Smart means being clever in planning for activities in the sun. Don’t forget to look after yourself and your family by using all five sun protection methods. You should understand your skin cancer risk by checking with your General Practitioner (GP). You should get to know your skin by regularly self-checking. You may need specialist attention from a dermatologist, and your GP will refer you to one if this is the case.”

ENDS

Links to further information

[Sun protection and babies fact sheet](#)



[Sunscreen fact sheet](#)

[ACD sun protection and sunscreen position statement](#)

[A-Z of Skin](#)

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About the Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD):

The ACD is the peak medical college accredited by the Australian Medical Council for the training and professional development of medical practitioners in the speciality of dermatology. They provide authoritative information about dermatology to Government, the media, other health professionals and the general public.

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