

MEDIA RELEASE



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THE BACKYARD NOW THE EXTREME UV ZONE FOR AUSTRALIANS

From beach burns to backyard scorchings, The Cancer Council Australia today released initial findings from the first National Sun Survey that show Australians are almost twice as likely to get sunburnt at home than at the beach.

Launching National Skin Cancer Action Week, the Cancer Council revealed that almost one in five Australians were sunburnt on summer weekends.

Of those sunburnt, the survey showed that 32% of Australians were burnt gardening or working around the home while 17% were burnt at the beach or in the water. A further 24% were burnt while enjoying outdoor activities such as picnics, BBQs and socialising.

Dr Andrew Penman, spokesperson for the Cancer Council Australia said, "Australians seem to be associating sun protection with the beach but not with their incidental outdoor activity. It takes as little as 15 minutes to burn in extreme UV radiation so covering up while pulling out the weeds or walking the dog is just as important."

The survey found that 8% of Australians went to the beach over the weekend, however, 29% spent time gardening or working around the home.

"We know that sunburn increases your risk of skin cancer later in life so we want to urge all Australians to Slip! Slop! Slap! whenever they're outdoors this summer. Find shade, wear light clothing, put on a hat and sunglasses and apply sunscreen regularly to exposed skin."

The National Sun Survey also asked respondents which part of their body was most likely to get sunburnt. The highest proportions of burns (42%) were on the arms and hands.

Associate Professor Afaf Girgis, Cancer Council researcher said, "The survey found that just under half the men who were sunburnt over the weekend were burnt on their face and head. It is not surprising that these sites are the most common sites for skin cancer in men.

"Women seem to be doing more to shield their head and face from the sun, as significantly fewer women were sunburnt on these parts of the body. This may be because of their knowledge of premature ageing, but we still have a way to go in encouraging women to protect their shoulders, arms and hands.

"Fashion may be dictating the lack of protection for women but there is nothing fashionable about a skin cancer," said Associate Professor Girgis.

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According to the Cancer Council, skin cancer is predominantly caused by overexposure to ultraviolet radiation. However, sunburn isn't the only cause – tanning or too much sun, year after year, can also lead to the disease.

“Skin cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. We hope these new findings will remind Australians not to be complacent when they're out in the sun this summer,” said Dr Penman.

The National Sun Survey reveals the sun-related behaviours of more than 5000 Australian adults aged 18 to 69 during peak UV times on summer weekends in 2003-04. The research was funded by the Cancer Council Australia and the Australian Department of Health and Ageing.

National Skin Cancer Action Week is an initiative of The Cancer Council Australia's Skin Cancer Committee, aiming to raise awareness of skin cancer and sun protection issues at the start of the summer season.

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Available for Interview:

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