

MEDIA RELEASE

Sunday 13 November, 2005

Teens resist urge to tan **National Skin Cancer Action Week: 13-19 November**

Almost 90% of teenagers are now aware of the risk of skin cancer through sun exposure, and two thirds are resisting the urge to tan, according to new data released today.

The Cancer Council's National Sun Survey shows that 68% of 12 to 17 year olds did not attempt to get a tan over the summer the survey was conducted (2003-04), even though 60% indicated they would like one.

The findings – released at the launch of National Skin Cancer Action Week – were welcomed by The Cancer Council Tasmania's Chief Executive Officer, Mr Lawson Ride.

"This is good news, especially with the summer school holidays just around the corner," Mr Ride said. "These findings indicate that messages about skin cancer and sun protection are starting to connect with young Australians."

However, he cautioned the survey results aren't all good, particularly in relation to adoption of sun protection behaviour.

"The fact that sixty eight per cent of teenagers did not go out and actively attempt to get a tan is a positive result, and teenagers should be commended for that," Mr Ride said.

"But there are some concerning results too – for example, twenty five per cent of teenagers are still getting sunburnt on a typical summer weekend.

"We need to remember to protect ourselves not just at the beach, but when we are enjoying a BBQ in the backyard, playing sport, or are just out and about."

Hobart dermatologist Dr Andrew Jevtic said sun exposure at a young age made an important contribution to the risk of developing skin cancer later in life.

"But skin cancer isn't something only older people get – a quarter of all cancers in people aged 15-19 are melanomas, the most serious and potentially deadly form of skin cancer," Dr Jevtic said. "Melanomas are more common in this age group than any other form of cancer.

"It's reassuring that teenagers seem to be heeding the advice of organisations like the Cancer Council and the College of Dermatologists and are taking steps to save their skin."

He said as well as skin cancer, overexposure to the sun could lead to premature ageing and pre-cancerous skin lesions such as sun spots.

"Some people think that as long as they get don't sunburnt, they're safe – but we know that tanning without burning may cause DNA and skin damage, which can lead to premature ageing and potentially skin cancer," Dr Jevtic said.

The Chair of The Cancer Council Australia's Skin Cancer Committee, Mr Craig Sinclair, said the survey provided interesting insights into teenagers' beliefs about skin cancer and sun protection, as well as their sun protection behaviour.

"Not only are most teenagers aware of the link between skin cancer risk and sun exposure, fewer teenagers (41%) than adults (50%) believe a tanned person looks more healthy," he said.

"That is a great step forward, but the fact that a quarter of teenagers get sunburnt on a typical weekend is a problem we need to overcome.

"We need to encourage them to take a multifaceted approach to sun protection. That means not just relying on sunscreen, but wearing sunglasses, a hat that protects the face, neck and ears – like the fashionable bucket hats, protective clothing, and seeking out shade when they are outdoors."

Hobart hairdresser Di Brown, 44, was diagnosed with the most serious form of skin cancer – melanoma – five years ago.

"As a teenager, sunbathing was one of my favourite pastimes – my friends and I would make a social occasion of it, smothering ourselves in baby oil and lining up our banana lounges in the backyard," she said.

"If I'd known then that I'd be having a potentially deadly cancer cut out of my back before my fortieth birthday, I would have been much more careful."

Di has been clear of skin cancer for five years and is now careful to Slip! Slop! Slap! and seek shade while continuing to enjoy the outdoors.

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For further information, contact:

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FACT SHEET



Skin cancer

Skin cancer in Australia

- Around 225 Tasmanians are diagnosed with melanoma – the most serious form of skin cancer – every year (9000 Australia-wide).
- Around 30 Tasmanians die from melanoma every year (more than 1000 Australia-wide).
- In addition to melanomas, more than 370,000 cases of non-melanoma skin cancer are treated Australia-wide.
- At least one in two Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer in their lifetime.
- Skin cancers account for around 80% of all new cancers diagnosed each year in Australia.
- Australians are four times more likely to develop a common skin cancer than any other form of cancer.
- Australian survival rates from melanoma are generally higher than in other countries because we are now more aware of the signs of skin cancer, and detect them early.

About the National Sun Survey

The Cancer Council Australia's National Sun Survey was conducted by telephone interviews during summer 2003-04. This is the first survey to concurrently assess the sun protection behaviours and sunburn of Australian adults and adolescents.

The results of the National Sun Survey are being analysed and released progressively during 2004 and 2005.

Sun protection tips

The Cancer Council recommends that Tasmanians take all of the following steps to reduce their risk of skin cancer:

- Take particular care when ultraviolet (UV) radiation levels are at their highest (between 11am and 3pm during daylight savings).
- Make use of natural and built shade where possible.
- Wear sun protective clothing.
- Wear a hat that protects the face, neck and ears.
- Wear close-fitting sunglasses.
- Use a broad spectrum, water resistant SPF30+ sunscreen and reapply every two hours.