

Media Release

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Men and the sun!

Many New Zealand men are not taking enough care in the sun during the summer months. A three-yearly survey of New Zealanders' sun protection awareness and behaviour shows that many men are unaware, or choose to ignore the risks of excessive UVR during summer.

In a nationally representative sample of 1,250 people, regarding sun safety knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, just under half (46 percent) of men reported being severely sunburnt in the past - enough to cause blisters or pain for two or more days!

Most men (83%) who responded to the survey had been outdoors the previous weekend when UVR levels are high to extreme by WHO standards, and nearly a quarter (23%) of those who had been outside reported that they had got sunburnt. The areas of the body most commonly sunburnt were the face, lower arms and neck - parts of the body that tend to be less covered.

Of those men who had been outdoors, 55 percent reported wearing a hat, 52 percent noted they wore clothing which covered their torso, while only 41 percent wore sunscreen. Many men tend to wear caps rather than more protective hats that also cover the face, neck and ears, which are vulnerable parts of the body.

The good news is that of those men who had been outside, 54 percent had stayed out of the sun or in the shade at some point, while in the 18-24 year old age group, only one percent had tried to get a suntan as opposed to nine percent of females who had done so.

According to Dr Judith Galtry, Skin Cancer Advisor, "it is critical to avoid sunburn as it increases the risk of melanoma in later life. This country has the world's highest melanoma rate and male rates of this cancer are consistently higher than women's."

In 2007 (the year for which the latest statistics are available) there were 178 deaths and 1123 registered cases of melanoma among men. The death rate from melanoma was 90 percent higher among men than women in 2007. This is likely because men have a higher overall incidence rate, thicker melanomas and so, consequently, poorer outcomes than women. Men are less likely to seek an early medical opinion.

"Early detection is absolutely critical with melanoma, but many people, particularly men over 60, don't get their moles checked at all. If you notice any new skin lesion or changes in a spot, mole or freckle, ask your GP to take a look or to refer you to a melanoma specialist," says Dr Galtry

For further information on sun protection, skin cancer and skin cancer statistics visit our website www.cancernz.org.nz/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart/

To see the full Sun Exposure Survey 2010 <http://www.sunsmart.org.nz/sites/default/files/u40/SES-Adult-Topline-Report-fnl-101101.pdf>

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Skin cancer

Some examples of skin changes are a spot or sore that does not heal, an itchy bleeding or ulcerating spot or changes in a mole or freckle (e.g. in colour, size or shape).

Become aware of what your skin looks like normally so that you notice any changes.

Check your skin regularly and ask for assistance from your partner or a family member. If you notice anything unusual that does not go away within one month show it to your doctor.

How is skin cancer diagnosed?

- Physical examination by your doctor
- Removal or biopsy of the area that has changed

Risk

The people most at risk of skin cancer are those with a history of sunburn, fair skin, red or fair hair, have freckles or many moles or a personal and/or family history of skin cancer.

Men at risk include those who have been sunburnt, work or spend long periods of time outdoors, work indoors but get a lot of sun exposure in their leisure time or use sunbeds, sunlamps or solariums.

There is a greatly increased risk of skin cancer if your immune system is lowered by drugs such as immunosuppressants taken after an organ transplant.