



**Cancer Society of New Zealand  
Te Rōpū Mate Pukupuku o Aotearoa**

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## **New Zealanders warned to get serious about guarding against skin cancer**

With the summer holiday period fast approaching many people are planning outdoor activities such as camping, picnics, boating, swimming and tramping and are being warned to take skin cancer seriously. The latest figures show there has been no significant decline in melanoma rates in New Zealand.

Cancer Society New Zealand Skin Cancer Prevention Advisor Dr Judith Galtry says the most recent statistics released by the New Zealand Health Information Service show that in 2004:

- 1,896 people were diagnosed with melanoma (949 men and 947 women)
- 249 people died of melanoma (152 males and 97 females).
- among women, melanoma was the third most common cancer after breast and colorectal cancer and, among men, the fourth most common cancer after prostate, colorectal and lung cancers.

Dr Galtry comments that while melanoma occurs most often in older people, it can also affect younger people. "Among males in the 25 to 44 year age group, melanoma was the leading cancer (122 registrations), and the cause of 17 deaths in 2004. For females aged 15 to 24 years, melanoma was the most common cancer (12 cases).

"There are also over 45,000 cases of non-melanoma and melanoma skin cancer each year in New Zealand, making skin cancer the most diagnosed cancer in New Zealand.

Dr Galtry added that an independent three yearly survey of New Zealanders' sun protective behaviours, commissioned by the Cancer Society, showed a significant proportion of New Zealanders are still not using the recommended five measures to protect themselves from the sun.

The latest wave (carried out during the 2005/06 summer) found the following:

- younger people and those with fair skin were significantly more likely to have been sunburnt on the previous weekend, than older individuals and those with olive or dark skin
- as with previous years, parts of the body burnt on the previous weekend were most likely to be those not protected from the sun by clothing (e.g. the face neck, arms below elbows)
- of those sunburnt the previous weekend, males were significantly more likely than females to get burnt on the face, whilst females were more likely to experience burning to the shoulders than males

These statistics are disturbing given that the risk of developing melanoma in later life is increased if you have fair skin and/or have experienced intermittent burning, particularly in childhood and adolescence.

Dr Louise Reiche, skin specialist at Palmerston North's Aorangi Hospital, says, "while we want New Zealanders to be active and enjoy our great outdoors, the best protection against future skin cancers, especially for fair skinned people is to limit sun exposure, particularly *binge* exposures as what often happens over the Festive season and summer school holidays.

"We need to change our psyche so that being outdoors *all day* and seeing skimpily clad bodies outdoors becomes as unacceptable as smoking because of the cancer risk. We need to avoid peak UV times, wear longer sleeve shirts / tops, longer skirts and trousers when outdoors, wear broad rim hats, UV protective sunglasses, gloves when gardening / golfing etc and regularly apply and re-apply liberal (large) quantities of broad spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreens.

The Cancer Society hopes these alarming figures will prompt New Zealanders to be SunSmart over the coming months.

Dr Galtry adds, "skin cancer is the most preventable cancer. We've been educating New Zealanders for years and the only way we can reduce these figures is if people make sun protection a number one priority.

"We're concerned that people are becoming too complacent about skin cancer. Our strong message to New Zealanders today is that skin cancer is serious, and it can be deadly."

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For further information on sun protection, skin cancer and skin cancer statistics visit the Cancer Society of New Zealand website, [www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz) or the SunSmart website [www.sunsmart.org.nz](http://www.sunsmart.org.nz)