



National Office  
PO Box 12700  
Wellington 6011

Telephone: 64 4 494-7270  
Facsimile: 64 4 494-7271

Websites: [www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz)  
[www.daffodilday.org.nz](http://www.daffodilday.org.nz)  
[www.relayforlife.org.nz](http://www.relayforlife.org.nz)  
Email: [admin@cancer.org.nz](mailto:admin@cancer.org.nz)

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Exposure to the midday sun risky way of getting vitamin D**

Most New Zealanders get enough vitamin D through the sunlight exposure they get during their everyday activities, say skin cancer prevention groups.

The Cancer Society and Health Sponsorship Council, who jointly manage the SunSmart programme, and the Melanoma Foundation of New Zealand, are responding to suggestions from a speaker at a recent Massey University symposium that people should go out in the midday sun to increase their vitamin D levels.

Cancer Society Health Promotion Manager Dr Jan Pearson says adequate vitamin D is essential for general health, particularly for bone, joint, muscle and neurological function.

“However, sensible sun protection practices should not put people at risk of vitamin D deficiency. Therefore, a balance is required between avoiding an increased risk of skin cancer and maintaining adequate vitamin D levels.”

Heather Hyland, Executive Director of the Melanoma Foundation of New Zealand, says people should avoid getting sunburnt, because this increases the risk of melanoma skin cancer.

“Over 250 New Zealanders die from melanoma each year - we have the highest melanoma incidence rates in the world.

“It is important New Zealanders cover up to avoid sunburn, and reduce their melanoma risk.”

Dr Pearson says most New Zealanders will get enough vitamin D through just being out and about during summer without deliberately exposing their skin, particularly during peak ultraviolet (UV) radiation periods.

“People deficient in vitamin D have the option of taking supplements. This is far safer than being out unprotected, in the midday sun.”

She warns against the use of sunbeds as a way of getting vitamin D, as was suggested at the symposium.

“The intensity of radiation at some wavelengths from some sunbeds is several times higher than the intensity of radiation that occurs in sunlight at the earth’s surface.

“The use of sunbeds increases the risk of melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer.”

SunSmart spokesperson Wayde Beckman says when the ultraviolet index (UVI) is three or above, we need to follow the golden rule to ‘slip, slop, slap and wrap’ - slip on a shirt or into the shade, slap on a wide-brimmed hat, slop on plenty of broad spectrum SPF30+ sunscreen, and wrap on a pair of sunglasses.

“It’s important not to underestimate the power of the sun at this time of the year, and to remember that it’s not the sun’s heat that burns, but UV radiation, which is at its highest between September and April, especially from 11am and 4pm.”

#### **For further information**

Dr Jan Pearson, Health Promotion Manager, Cancer Society of NZ, 04 494 7276, 0274 517 359