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MEDIA RELEASE

10 December, 2010

The value of sunscreen

The Cancer Society says ground-breaking Australian research shows that daily sunscreen use can prevent melanoma in adults. Dr Judith Galtry, Skin Cancer Advisor said the study by the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR) was perhaps the most important study ever conducted in assessing the effect of sunscreen on skin cancer risk.

As part of the study, 1,621 randomly selected Queensland residents participated in a trial which ran from 1992 to 1996. Half the participants applied sunscreen every day and the other half continued to apply sunscreen as they would normally. Fifteen years after the trial, the number of people who developed melanomas from the discretionary sunscreen group was double that of the group who had applied sunscreen daily.

“We have always been told to ‘slip, slop, slap and wrap’ to prevent skin cancer but until now the effectiveness of sunscreen protection against melanoma has been highly controversial. This study clearly shows that using sunscreen can significantly reduce the risk of developing a skin cancer.

“This is very important research for New Zealanders as we have a high risk of developing all forms of skin cancer and the highest incidence of melanoma in the world. It tells us that sunscreen is a vital part of the skin cancer prevention arsenal. Lately we’ve been hearing concerns raised about sunscreens, which has led to many New Zealanders being wary about its use.”

Skin cancer is the most common cancer affecting New Zealanders. There are more than 60,000 new cases each year and more than 300 deaths from it. Melanoma is potentially the most serious form of skin cancer with around 2,000 new cases and 250 deaths each year.

“We know from research that people do not apply enough sunscreen for it to be effective and they don’t reapply often enough throughout the day. This latest information gives us all good reason to use sunscreen to reduce our skin cancer risk, although it should not be the only sun safety measure - sun hats, clothing that covers much of the body and sunglasses are also important.”

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<http://jco.ascopubs.org/content/early/2010/12/02/JCO.2010.28.7078.abstract?sid=346e39d9-3567-4784-8755-b6b43d16c7f9>

http://www.cancernz.org.nz/assets/files/info/Information%20Sheets/IS_Sunscreen_Dec2010.pdf