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New Sun Protection Alert will help protect Kiwis' skin this summer

From next month, New Zealanders will have a new, easy-to-use tool that tells them when they need to protect their skin from the sun, with specific reference to where in the country they live.

Wayde Beckman of SunSmart says because sun protection times are based mainly on latitude, they differ up and down the country. "The new Sun Protection Alert conveys simple information that's specific to each area of the country for that day, and is easy for people to act on."

Sun safety messages such as 'seek shade' and 'reapply sunscreen' will be incorporated and changed regularly to reflect changes in weather forecasts.

Mr Beckman says if it's a cloudy day, the Sun Protection Alert will say 'even on cloudy days' to remind people that sunburn can still occur because ultraviolet radiation (UV) penetrates cloud cover. UV levels can be even higher on these days because of reflection from the clouds.

"Sunburn is a big concern because it is linked to melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer. Unfortunately, our Kiwi lifestyle and fierce sun, has given us the highest rate of melanoma in the world. Over the last four years, New Zealand melanoma death rates have been on a par with the road toll. "It is especially important to never let your children get sunburnt. Sunburn in childhood increases the chances of melanoma later in life."

He says skin cancer is largely preventable by taking simple measures to protect ourselves from the sun. "During the daylight saving months, especially between 10am and 4pm, remember to 'slip, slop, slap and wrap' - slip on a shirt or into the shade, slop on plenty of broad-spectrum SPF30+ sunscreen, slap on a hat and wrap on a pair of wrap-around sunglasses."

And Mr Beckman says there's no such thing as windburn. "Wind can lower the air temperature though, making it easy to forget that UV from the sun is still strong."

The Sun Protection Alert has been developed in association with the MetService and the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) following extensive research, and replaces the UV index. The Sun Protection Alert will be available on the websites of MetService www.metservice.co.nz, NIWA, www.niwa.co.nz and SunSmart www.sunsmart.org.nz, and in most daily newspapers.

Mr Beckman says testing of the Sun Protection Alert has shown it motivates people to use sun protection while outdoors.

For advice on choosing a sunscreen that will help to protect you from the sun, visit your local community pharmacy. And visit your local Visique store to find a suitable pair of sunglasses.

For more information Wayde Beckman, SunSmart Marketing & Communications, HSC on 027 289 6680 The Sun Protection Alert example graphic can be downloaded from the SunSmart website media release section - www.sunsmart.org.nz/media-releases/