

BE SUN SMART

We've already been treated to many days of great sunshine and higher temperatures than is the norm for this time of year, and when the sun does pop out you want to have a good understanding of what you need to do and how you need to do it to keep you and your family safe for decades to come.

Taking care in the sun

SOME FACTS:

- Skin cancer is by far the most common cancer in Ireland among both men and women
- There are 5,500 new cases of skin cancer diagnosed in Ireland every year
- One in every eight men and one in every ten women will develop skin cancer by the age of 74 years
- 80-90% of skin cancers are caused by the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays and can be prevented
- About 80-85% of UV rays can pass through clouds so you need to take care on cloudy days too
- Damage to the skin by the sun is permanent. It also builds up - that means damage to the skin in one year is added to damage done in previous years. In later life this can lead to skin cancer
- It is therefore necessary to protect ourselves so that we can enjoy the sun without damaging our skin.

Who is at risk?

Everyone who spends time outdoors is at risk - not just those who sunbathe.

In particular, people who spend a lot of time working or playing outdoors have a higher risk of getting skin cancer and need to protect their skin.

Take extra care if you:

- Have pale or freckled skin that doesn't tan or burns before it tans
- Have naturally red or fair hair and blue, green or grey eyes
- Have a large number of moles (50 or more)
- Burn easily, have a history of sunburn or have already had skin cancer.

Facts about sunscreen

- The higher the Sun Protection Factor (SPF) number, the greater the protection provided.
- A SPF above 15 gives high protection
- However, wearing sunscreen does not mean that you can stay out in the sun longer than recommended - it offers some protection, but should be used with cover-up clothing
- It is very important to apply sunscreen thickly and evenly. Most people get a lot less protection than they think because they do not put enough sunscreen on their skin
- Remember! Those parts of the body that are not usually exposed to the sun will tend to
- Burn more easily

- Also, take extra care of ears, neck, bald patches, hands and feet.

Watch out for the sunburn forecast

- The sunburn forecast is given by Met Eireann in summer months and warns when the UV levels are likely to be high.
- The sunburn forecast tells you how long it will most likely take for an average white skinned person to burn in the midday sun
- Remember that the sunburn forecast is based on an average person. Pale or fair skinned people and children who have sensitive skin will burn more quickly
- The sunburn forecast is usually given on the radio, TV and in newspapers. Always check the weather forecast so that you are wearing the proper cover-up clothing.

How to be SunSmart!

COVER UP

- Wear a wide-brimmed hat or a hat with a neck flap to protect your neck
- Wear a t-shirt or other shirt with a close-weave material.

Use sunscreen

- Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) 15 or higher
- Make sure it has UVA and UVB protection
- Put sunscreen on 20 minutes before going out into the sun
- Use lots of sunscreen and reapply every two hours (more often if you have been swimming or sweating).

Seek shade

Avoid being out in the sun between 11am and 3pm
Use sun umbrellas and other types of shade to protect you from the sun.

Protect your eyes

Wear sunglasses that give a high protection against UV rays. Look at the label and check the standard: BS Standard (BS 27 24 19 87) or European Standard (EN 1836).

Sun-Smart kids!

Children spend more time outdoors and get an average of three times more sunrays than adults. Because of this, over a lifetime most people will get 80% of their exposure to the sun in their youth and only 20% as an adult.

Severe sunburn in childhood increases the risk of developing skin cancer later in life.

- Children's skin is very sensitive to the sun's rays.
- All children, whether they tan easily or not, should always be protected
- Babies under the age of six months should be protected from the sun at all times. Ideally they should be kept in the shade as much as possible. Infant sunscreen should only be used if necessary and you should do a patch test before using it

- Keep older children safe by following the SunSmart guidelines.

How does the sun damage our skin?

The sun produces Ultraviolet Radiation (UV) and two types reach the earth's surface - UVA and UVB. Both UVA and UVB are now known to cause skin cancer.

UVA over-exposure results in early ageing and skin cancer UVB is the most harmful, causing burning and skin cancer

Remember! Tanned skin, not just sunburnt skin, is damaged skin.

A tan is a sign that damaged skin is trying to protect itself from the sun's ultraviolet rays. And even when you have a suntan, you can still get sunburn.

Skin cancer

There are two main types of skin cancer:

Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer:

This type of skin cancer is the most common and is very curable.

Look out for:

- A new growth or sore that does not heal within four weeks
- A spot or sore that continues to itch, hurt, crust, scab or bleed
- Constant skin ulcers that are not explained by other causes.

Malignant Melanoma:

This is the most serious type of skin cancer but it is also the rarest.

It most often appears as a changing mole or freckle. If it is discovered and treated early any cases can be cured.

Look out for:

- Changes in the colour, shape or size of moles or freckles.

Many skin changes will be harmless, but if you notice anything unusual, you should visit your doctor

This information is from the Irish Cancer Society