



## CLOUD NO COVER FROM UV BURNING

**Media release - 31 January 2007**

The cloudy, grey summer packed a double punch for many unwitting Kiwis – not only did they miss out on the golden days they expect during the holiday season. They got burned too.

It's a warning for the remainder of the summer.

"A lot of people have been caught out," says SunSmart spokesperson Wendy Billingsley. "And no doubt, many more will be fooled in weeks to come by the false belief that if you can't see the sun, it can't hurt you."

The culprit responsible for that bright red, painful skin after time spent out doors is Ultraviolet Radiation (UVR) from the sun. And those who think that cloud will protect them have been proved painfully wrong.

"Most people these days understand that the sun gives out UV radiation that burns the skin. The SunSmart messages that encourage people to monitor UV levels and to take protective measures are getting through. But less understood is that even on cloudy days we are at risk. On days with light cloud cover the UVR may be only slightly reduced!"

Even conditions of heavier cloud exposure can be dangerous because people may be inclined to underestimate the risk and spend longer periods outside unprotected.

Ms Billingsley says there is no room for complacency in New Zealand's harsh UV environment.

"You may not be able to see the sun through cloud, but if the UVR is high enough you can still get burned."

With more settled weather predicted in the coming weeks, and warmer sea temperatures, SunSmart behaviour is an even greater priority.

MetService Weather Ambassador Bob McDavitt says "The hottest days of the year will be occurring in early February, and the seas will be reaching their annual peak temperature between now and late March. This will be the most enticing time for visiting the beach. Although the peak UV intensities by then should be slightly less than their summer time peaks, UV levels at the beach are often higher because of reflected light from sand and water. Remember that slip slop slap and wrap starts when the UV Index is at 6."

The UV risk is greatest on partly cloudy days when the sun is not obscured. Under these conditions, UV intensities can be 20% more than for cloudless skies.

For more information on the UV Index, how UV affects different skin types and appropriate protective action go to [www.sunsmart.org.nz](http://www.sunsmart.org.nz)

Relevant Statistics:

- More than 300 New Zealanders die from skin cancer every year.
- Skin cancer is by far the most common cancer affecting New Zealanders.
- Of the 3 most common skin cancers, melanoma is the most serious.
- NZ has one of the highest melanoma death rates in the world. The most recent published statistics are for 2002, showing 235 reported deaths from melanoma in that year.
- In 2002 there were 111 deaths from non-melanoma skin cancers.
- Skin cancer costs the New Zealand health system about \$33 million a year, making skin cancer one of the most expensive cancers for the NZ health system.
- It has been estimated that, for every death from skin cancer, an average of 17.4 potential years of life are lost.
- The vast majority of skin cancers are preventable - it has been estimated that over 90% of melanomas in Australasia are attributable to sunlight exposure.
- Exposure before the age of 20 years is a particularly strong risk factor for melanoma incidence.

**For further information:**

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