



## Ozone hole smaller but ultra violet radiation on the rise

**Media release: embargoed until 3 January 2008**

New Zealanders are being warned to cover up and use sun block as levels of ultra violet radiation reach their peak over the Christmas and New year holiday period.

"A combination of the sun being at its highest in the sky and the break-up of the ozone hole over the Antarctic, makes this the worst time for ultra violet radiation. And it's also the period when we tend to spend more time than usual outdoors," says Dr Richard McKenzie of the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA).

Exposure to ultra violet radiation or UVR is the main cause of the most common form of skin cancer, melanoma, in New Zealand. Particularly vulnerable are children under the age of 20 who risk contracting skin cancer later in life as a result of getting sunburn. With UV rays at their strongest over Christmas, the SunSmart campaign is urging parents to protect their children from the harmful effects of the sun while outdoors enjoying the warmer weather and daylight saving.

"Over-exposure to the sun's ultraviolet radiation is the cause of over 90 percent of all skin cancer - making prevention crucial. Parents need to make sure their kids always Slip, Slop, Slap and Wrap," says [name] of [org].

"Teaching children about sun safety is the key to reducing the risk of skin cancer in the future. Never let your kids get sunburnt. Make sure they have protective gear on, such as a shirt with collar and sleeves, from 11am until 4pm and slip into the shade, slop on some sunscreen, slap on a hat and wrap on a pair of sunglasses."

NIWA's Dr Richard McKenzie says although the ozone hole appears smaller than last year, ultra violet radiation is on the up at this time of the year.

"Even though the sun is at its highest on 21 December, ozone levels continue to decrease throughout the summer. So maximum UV intensities usually occur in the Christmas and New Year period. Ozone acts like a giant shield against the sun's harmful radiation and is less able to protect us from ultra violet radiation at this time of the year."

Unlike tropical countries that have a relatively constant UVR level, New Zealand has a huge variation between summer minimum and winter maximum levels. Dr McKenzie says at this time of year people in the north of

the country are most at risk because the sun is higher in the sky and the summertime ozone levels are lower. (will this be relevant to people down south? Perhaps it could say "Dr McKenzie says at this time of year people in the north of the country are most at risk because the sun is higher in the sky but summertime ozone levels throughout New Zealand are lower at this time and therefore is important we all follow the SunSmart rules - Slip, Slop, Slap and wrap.)

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**For further information:**

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