



SUNSMART

Don't wait to feel the heat before being SunSmart, Kiwis warned

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New Zealanders heading outdoors after a long winter are being warned not to underestimate the burning power of the early summer sun.

Wayde Beckman of the Health Sponsorship Council (HSC) says people can get badly sunburnt at this time of the year because cooler temperatures lull them into a false sense of security. As well, their skin has usually received very little ultraviolet radiation or UVR exposure over winter and may be sensitive to the higher early-summer UVR.

He says people think the sun has to 'feel' hot to burn and that's a dangerous misconception. "People think it's the heat in the sun that burns but it is actually the UVR and you can't feel that."

Mr Beckman says it's important to remember that heat or high temperatures are not related to levels of UVR.

"Temperature relates to the amount of infrared radiation present in sunlight, not UVR, so it's wrong to use temperature as a guide to decide when sun protection is needed."

MetService Weather Ambassador Bob McDavitt agrees. He says temperatures around the country may still be low but UV levels are rising and, for many people, exposure to a UV reading of three or above for an hour is all it takes to get sunburnt.

"These levels are already happening, but with the recent swing back to cool temperatures, along with cloudy and windy days, people may not be feeling the warmth that normally accompanies sunlight."

Over-exposure to the sun's UVR is the cause of over 90 percent of all skin cancer and Wayde Beckman of the HSC is warning New Zealanders to remember the sun safety rules.

"At this time of year, even if the day is cloudy, remember the SunSmart messages – never get sunburnt, slip, slop, slap and wrap and always plan for a SunSmart day. That means making sure you have protective gear on, such as a shirt with collar and sleeves, slip into the shade, slop on some sunscreen, slap on a hat and wrap on a pair of sunglasses."

Mr Beckman says people should get into the habit of checking the daily UV readings for their town, just like they check the weather forecast. The UV Index can be found online and in most daily newspapers. The interactive online site also allows people to get personal UV recommendations for their skin type.

He says people can still enjoy the sun without risking their health and sensible sun protection behaviour should not put people at risk of vitamin D deficiency.

Further information

Wayde Beckman, Manager SunSmart, HSC, 027 289 6680

For further information on sun protection and skin cancer, and to check the UVI, go to the SunSmart website www.sunsmart.org.nz or the Cancer Society of New Zealand website www.cancernz.org.nz