



SUNSMART

Protect children from sun, or they risk melanoma later

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'Never let your child get sunburnt' is one of this summer's SunSmart messages, and it's particularly aimed at the parents of 8 to 12 year olds.

About 300 Kiwis die every year from skin cancer, most from the deadliest form of the disease, melanoma, which is strongly linked to sunburn in childhood and adolescence.

Wayde Beckman from the Health Sponsorship Council (HSC) says skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in New Zealand and this country has among the highest rates in the world.

"Never let your children get sunburnt. Sunburn now is linked to melanoma later on."

He says New Zealanders are particularly at risk of skin cancer because of a set of unique conditions.

"The sun's ultraviolet rays are much more intense in New Zealand than in the northern hemisphere. We naturally have more UV light than northern climes anyway, but our atmosphere is also cleaner which allows even more UV through.

"The orbit of the earth around the sun means the planet is closer to the sun in our summer than when the northern hemisphere is having its summer.

"It's also cooler here in summer than in somewhere like Australia. In really hot places, you often have no choice but to stay undercover. But in New Zealand in summer the temperature can be perfect for staying out in the sun at the beach or pool all day. You can get severely sunburnt, and not realise it until you painfully peel off your togs in the evening.

"All this can lead to excess exposure to the sun's UV rays. And excess exposure, especially sunburn, as a child leaves that child with an increased risk of getting melanoma as an adult.

"It's about being sensible and managing the risk while continuing to enjoy the outdoors. Sun safety doesn't need to take the fun out of summer but parents need to be proactive and make sure their children slip into protective clothing like shirts with collars and longer sleeves and some shade especially in daylight saving months between the peak UV hours of 11am-4pm when the sun is at its strongest.

"Slap on a broad-brimmed hat or cap with flaps; wrap on a pair of close fitting sunglasses that knock back at least 90 percent of the sun's UV rays; and slop on a broad spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreen."

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

This year SunSmart Week runs from November 9-15.

For more information:

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