



**WORKERS HEALTH CENTRE**

People | Recovery | Work

**Health And Safety**

**Fact Sheet**

# Skin Cancer and Outside Work



**Australia has the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world About 1200 people die from skin cancer in Australia each year, 80% from melanoma.**

The majority of skin cancers are caused as a direct result of frequent and prolonged exposure to the sun, about 90% of cancers are found on exposed areas such as the hands and face. Outdoor workers such as those listed below have a high risk of developing skin cancer.

- Municipal employees
- Road workers
- Building and construction workers
- Postal workers
- Gardeners
- Dockyard and harbor workers
- Outdoor sports and entertainment workers
- Jockeys

## There are three main types of skin cancer:

- 1 Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)** is the most common type; it is usually very small, doesn't spread inside the body and is usually not fatal. The most common areas affected are the central face, nose and eyelids.
- 2 Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)** rarely spread to other parts of the body & is seldom fatal. However, it can leave bad scars if is not treated early. This cancer develops rapidly and is less common than BCC.
- 3 Malignant Melanoma (MM)** is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. If not detected early and treated properly, it can spread to other part of the body. It can grow on places that have not been exposed to the sun - even under toenails and on the soles of the feet.

Skin cancer is usually treated by being surgically removed. The earlier the detection and treatment, the less likely that unsightly scarring and disfigurement will result. The importance of early diagnosis of melanoma cannot be over-emphasized.

## Prevention and Protection

There are many ways to protect yourself from the sun when you need to work outside. It is very important to take into account the following factors.

## Limit Exposure

The intensity of the sun's rays is at its greatest between 10 am and 2 pm (from 11 am to 3 pm during daylight saving).

Work practices should be modified to avoid any unnecessary exposure to ultra-violet radiation during these times. However, remember that skin protection is important all year round - not just in summertime.



## Wear Protective Clothing

Employers should provide suitable protective clothing for outside workers. Loose long sleeved shirts or blouses with a collar and long trousers or slacks to protect the arms and legs and a hat with an 8 cm wide brim or a cap with flaps.

## Wear Sunscreen

Employers should also provide a suitable sunscreen to protect those areas of skin still exposed to the sun. 15+ means that this type of sunscreen will give at least 15 times the protection that the skin would give. It should be applied to dry clean skin before exposure to the sun and thickly reapplied when you have been in the sun for more than 2 hours. You should still cover-up with protective clothing.

Workers who are regularly exposed to the sun should be warned about the potential hazards and advised on how to avoid exposure. Outdoor workers need to be clearly aware of the fact that every time they go out into the sun, they are a target for skin cancer. The effect of exposure is cumulative and is not reversible - the damage adds up until some years later when cancers start to appear.

**Remember: No matter what type of skin you have you are at risk of developing skin cancers!**

## It is very important to check for:

- Any new freckle, mole, sunspot or unhealed sore on your skin.
- A spot that looks different from the other spots around it.
- A spot that has changed in color, size or shape over the last few weeks or months.

## Useful contacts

- **Your Union**
- **WorkCover Authority of NSW**  
Information line **13 10 50**
- **NSW Cancer Council**  
Ph: (02) 9334 1900

**For further information and advice contact the Workers Health Centre**



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