



Media Release

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New research: Tanning attitudes changing, but not fast enough for melanoma rates

Young people put vanity before health 30 years after first Slip! Slop! Slap! message

On the 30-year anniversary of the Slip! Slop! Slap! campaign, SunSmart today released new research on tanning and issued a strong warning to young people not to put vanity before their health.

Since Sid the Seagull and the Slip! Slop! Slap! slogan arrived three decades ago, Victorians have significantly improved their SunSmart behaviour, but young people are still putting themselves at risk, with more than half (57%) of 13-17 year olds expressing a desire for a tan and 42% saying it makes them feel more attractive.

SunSmart Manager Sue Heward said while we've come a long way from the days of tin-foil, reef-oil and the dark tan aspirations of the 80s, there is still work to be done.

"Young people's tanning preferences have changed considerably over the decades. A survey in the late 1980s showed 75% of Victorian teenagers desiring a moderate to very dark tan; new Cancer Council research shows that last summer only 36% of teenagers said they desired a moderate to very dark tan.

"More than one in four teenagers now prefer not having a tan at all; in the 1987-88 survey only 18% of teenagers said they preferred the no-tan look.

"There's still a lot of work to do in shifting attitudes, as the desirability of a tan for appearance reasons is still strong, particularly for younger males and females in all age groups.

"However we find it concerning that still one in five 13-17 year olds thought there was little chance they would get melanoma or other skin cancers, and only 53% of 13-34 year olds believed it was difficult to treat melanoma.

Ms Heward said it is critical to get the message across to people, especially young people and adolescents, that tanning is not a sign of good health – it is a sign of your skin cells in trauma.

"Childhood and adolescence are critical periods during which sun exposure is more likely to contribute to skin cancer in later life," she said. "Australian adolescents have by far the highest incidence of malignant melanoma in the world, compared with adolescents in other countries – a statistic we shouldn't be proud of.

"In Victoria nearly 20 per cent of all cancers in 15 to 24 year olds are melanomas and these figures don't include the burden of non-melanoma skin cancers," she said.

Ms Heward said the message behind SunSmart is important for all Victorians.

"In Victoria alone 343 people will die from skin cancer (melanoma and non melanoma skin cancer) each year - this is more than the state's annual road toll. What is tragic is that skin cancer is one of Australia's most preventable cancers."





"From September to April, UV levels are three and above which is high enough to cause skin and eye damage, and lead to skin cancer. This should be a trigger for all Victorians to make sure they protect themselves and Slip! Slop! Slap! Seek! and Slide!," Ms Heward said.

For more information on skin cancer and skin protection visit sunsmart.com.au.

Survey Results: Tanning attitudes and behaviour

- The influence of friends and family remains important – 42% of 13-34 year olds agree that their friends think a suntan is a good thing and 17% agree that their close family are pro-tanning.
- 53% of 13-34 year olds desire a tan.
 - 57% of 13-17 year olds desire a tan.
- 42% of survey respondents believed a tan makes them more attractive to others.
- 28% felt healthier with a tan.
- 38% believed a suntanned person looks healthier.
- Around 30% reported they attempted to get a tan last summer (2009-10).
 - 35% of 13-17 year olds and 34% of 18-24 year olds attempted to get a tan last summer
- 20% of 13-34 year olds were burnt on the weekend of the survey
 - 26% of 13-17 year olds were burnt on the weekend of the survey
- Among respondents who liked to get a tan, 33% indicated they were likely to sunbathe during summer and 5% indicated they were likely to use a solarium.
- 52% believe skin cancer is inevitable given the Australian sun and beach culture and 20% thought there was little they could do to avoid melanoma or other skin cancers.

The Cancer Council Victoria survey was conducted during Summer 2009-10 with more than 1,400 Victorians aged 13 to 34 years. The online survey collected baseline data on sun protection knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

30 years of Slip! Slop! Slap!

This year marks three decades of the iconic Slip! Slop! Slap! message. Since Sid the singing Seagull first brought Victorians the sun protection message, the SunSmart program has developed into an internationally recognised and multi-faceted skin cancer control program.

Today the sun protection message has expanded to Slip! Slop! Slap! Seek! and Slide! and SunSmart plays a leadership role by promoting a balance between the risks of skin cancer from too much sun exposure and maintaining adequate vitamin D levels.

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