

Sun-smart behaviour

New Zealand's sun can have very high levels of ultraviolet (UV) radiation (as can sunbeds). Too much UV can damage your skin and lead to skin cancer, including melanoma, which is the most dangerous skin cancer. Being sun smart means always avoiding getting sunburned.

How to avoid too much UV

The best way to avoid too much UV is to avoid the sun between 10 am and 4 pm during the months of daylight saving. This is when UV is at its most intense.

If you do need to be outside during this time, there are several things you can do to cut down the amount of UV you are exposed to.

Shade

Shade is one of the best ways to protect your skin. Seek it out whenever you can, whether by using umbrellas or shelter.

Cover up

When you can't find shade, cover up to keep the sun off your skin and out of your eyes. Wear:

- a broad-brimmed or Legionnaire's-style hat (with flaps to protect your neck)
- sunglasses (preferably wrap-around) that are labelled as 100% protective against UVA and UVB rays
- tightly woven, loose-fitting, dark-coloured clothing that covers your arms, legs, and body. Some clothing designed for sun protection has UV protection factor (UPF) ratings. A UPF of 15 to 20 is good protection, 25 to 35 offers very good protection, and 40+ offers excellent protection.

Use sunscreen

Use sunscreen as well as protective clothing, hats, and sunglasses. Use it on any exposed skin you can't fully cover, such as your face. Always use a broad spectrum (UVA and UVB) sunscreen of at least SPF (sun protection factor) 30.

- Before applying any sunscreen, check it hasn't expired.
- Apply it to clean, dry skin at least 20 minutes before going outside.
- Use two coats – put a second coat on 10 to 20 minutes after the first one.
- Reapply it every two hours, even if it says it will give you longer protection. Also reapply it after swimming or if you are sweating.





Make sure you use enough sunscreen. As a guide, an average-sized adult should use 7 tsp for their whole body (arms, legs, torso, back, face, hands, neck and ears). That's a good cupped palm-full. You can see a short video on how much sunscreen to apply on the SunSmart page www.sunsmart.org.nz/be-sunsmart/use-sunscreen.

Avoid sunbeds

Some people think that using a sunbed is a safe way to tan, but this isn't true. Using a sunbed increases your risk of getting melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer. It also ages your skin prematurely. You can read more about the risks of using sunbeds on the Ministry of Health website.

Keep babies safe from the sun

Keep babies less than 6 months old out of the sun when the UV index is three or higher (the NIWA link below explains the UV index). If that's not possible, make sure your baby is wearing clothes and a hat for protection. Only apply sunscreen to areas that can't be protected by clothing or wraps, such as baby's face, ears, and hands.

Sun and vitamin D

We all need brief exposure to the sun to make enough vitamin D. Unless you have sun-damaged skin or a history of skin cancer, the best way to get this is by outside activity, such as a daily walk. The time of day you should do this varies with the season: around noon from May to August, or before 10 am or after 4 pm from September to April. Read the Ministry of Health's information on sun exposure and vitamin D (go to www.health.govt.nz and search for "Vitamin D").

HealthInfo recommends the following pages

- NIWA – UV and ozone (www.niwa.co.nz > Services > Online services > UV & ozone)
This page explains the UV index (UVI) and has links to graphs of local UV levels and smartphone apps to help you monitor UV levels.

Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed October 2017. Last updated January 2019.