

## FAQS – THE SUN, YOUR SKIN AND SKIN CANCER

### During which months do I need to take sun safety precautions?

The sun's radiation is strongest during the summer months. However, you should protect yourself from early spring right through to the fall. People often get sunburns in late April and May because the weather is cool they don't think the sun is strong enough to burn if they can't feel its heat.

### How does the sun cause skin cancer?

The sun's rays go into the skin and harm the DNA within the cells of the skin. The body naturally works to repair the damage, but it may not be able to fix everything. This can result in uncontrolled cell growth, leading to the development of skin cancer. Sunburns and suntans result from sun exposure and both are signs of skin damage. Repeated sun exposure over the years may result in changes such as wrinkles, mottling of skin colour and skin cancer. Because these changes happen over time, it is important to take action now to prevent problems in the future.

### Why do I need to wear a hat in the sun?

Two of the three most common skin cancers appear on the face, head and neck. Almost all of these tumours are caused by sun exposure over a long period of time. Protect these areas, including the ears, by wearing a broad-brimmed (more than 8 cm or 3 inches) or legionnaire-style hat with a back flap.

## YOUR RISK FOR GETTING SKIN CANCER DEPENDS ON TWO THINGS:

1. How much sun you get at work or during recreation, and
2. How your skin reacts to the sun.

People who are fair skinned, have light coloured eyes, are freckled, are unable to tan, burn easily, or have a lot of moles on their skin have a higher risk of getting skin cancer. Those who are in the sun regularly over time, or those who were sunburned as a child or adult, are at a greater risk. People with black or brown skin do have a lower risk of skin cancer compared to those with fair skin.

## SUN FACTS AND MYTHS

### I don't need to protect myself from the sun on a cloudy day in spring or summer.

MYTH. Yes, you need sun protection because up to 90% of the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation passes through light cloud cover.

### A tan protects my skin from the sun.

MYTH. A tan does not really provide much protection from the sun and is equal to a sun protection factor (SPF or protection against sunburn) of between 2 and 4.



For further information, visit [www.dermatology.ca/outdoorworkers](http://www.dermatology.ca/outdoorworkers)



# Sun Safety for Outdoor Workers



BC Cancer Agency  
CARE + RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Prevention Programs



**Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in Canada.**

**The prime cause of skin cancer is sun exposure.**

**If you work outdoors, you have a higher risk for developing this type of cancer because you are regularly exposed to the sun for long periods of time.**

**Often this exposure happens during those times in the day when the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which will harm the skin, is at its strongest between 12 noon and 2 pm.**

**The good news is that skin cancer is largely preventable. Protect yourself.**

#### HOW CAN I PREVENT SKIN CANCER?

1. Try to limit the amount of time you work outdoors in the direct sun from 11 am to 4 pm.
2. Seek shade from buildings, trees, canopies, etc., as much as possible, especially during lunch and coffee breaks.
3. Wear a wide-brimmed hat (more than 8 cm or 3 inches). Attach a back flap to a construction helmet to cover the back of the neck and a visor for the front of the face.
4. Wear clothing that covers as much of the body as possible. Fabrics which do not let light through work best. Make sure clothing is loose and comfortable.
5. Apply an SPF 30 or higher broad spectrum (protects against UVA and UVB) sunscreen to all exposed areas of skin before you go outside. Reapply at midday or more often if you are perspiring heavily.
6. Apply a broad spectrum SPF 30 lip balm.

#### SUNSCREEN: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Sunscreens do not block all ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Sunscreen should not be used to prolong your exposure to the sun, but rather to protect yourself when you are outdoors.

#### THE UV INDEX – HOW IT WORKS, WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The UV Index, issued daily by Environment Canada, is a simple measure of the intensity of the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation.

The index is a useful tool to alert you to the need for sun protection.

- The higher the index, the more careful you have to be when outside in the sun.
- The index is featured in the media (print, TV, radio and Internet) when it is expected to reach 3 or higher – and sun protective actions are needed.

UV Index	Description	Sun Protection Actions
0 – 2	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimal sun protection required for normal activity</li><li>• Wear sunglasses on bright days. If outside for more than one hour, cover up and use sunscreen</li></ul>
3 – 5	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take precautions - cover up, wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen - especially if you will be outside for 30 minutes or more</li><li>• Look for shade near midday when the sun is strongest</li></ul>
6 – 7	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protection required - UV damages the skin and can cause sunburn</li><li>• Reduce time in the sun between 11 am and 4 pm and take full precautions - seek shade, cover up, wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen</li></ul>
8 – 10	Very High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extra precautions required - unprotected skin will be damaged and can burn quickly</li><li>• Avoid the sun between 11 am and 4 pm and take full precautions - seek shade, cover up, wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen</li></ul>
11+	Extreme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take full precautions. Unprotected skin will be damaged and can burn in minutes. Avoid the sun between 11 am and 4 pm, cover up, wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen</li></ul>

Source: Environment Canada