



Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in New Zealand. Over 400 people die from melanoma and other skin cancers each year, and our melanoma incidence rates are one of the highest in the world. Yet, skin cancer is largely preventable with sensible use of sun protection.

The major cause of skin cancer is over exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun over many years. Even if exposure does not cause obvious sunburn, damage still occurs and can be especially harmful during childhood and adolescence. The harm continues to accumulate year after year, so start protecting your skin now.

Key messages

The Cancer Society advises sun protection when the Ultraviolet Index, which measures UVR intensity, is 3 or above. **Peak UVR times are from September to April, especially between 10am and 4pm. Around noon levels are often 'extreme'—a UVI above 10.**

UVI 3 or higher — It's time to cover up

Before going out in the summer sun make sure you are wearing appropriate clothing that protects your trunk, arms and legs. Also wear a hat that protects your face, ears, nose and neck. It is not just the fabric that is important; it is also the style of the garment. Choose styles that cover most of your body.

Examples of sun protective clothing include shirts with collars and long sleeves and lightweight trousers or knee-length or below the knee shorts. Sunscreen should not be the first or only line of defence against the sun, but should be used on any skin not covered by clothing.

Sun protective clothing

Most fabrics will give some protection from the sun, but there are basic guidelines for choosing the best type of fabric and garments.

- **Fabric:** The way fabric is made influences its ability to protect against the sun. Tightly woven or knitted fabrics offer the best protection.
- **Colour:** If possible, select a darker shade as these give better protection than lighter ones. If you have chosen a looser weave fabric then choose a darker colour. For best protection choose clothing with a tighter weave in a dark colour.
- **Fibre type:** Some fibre types will be cooler to wear than others, for example, natural fibres like cotton will help protect you and keep you cooler.
- **Stretch:** Fabrics that stretch when they are worn will offer less sun protection than those that do not.
- **Wetness:** Wet clothing provides less sun protection than dry clothing. If it is to be worn in the water, choose fabrics that will give good protection, for example, tight structure, dark colour, not stretched or a loose fit. If you are not going to change into a dry garment after use, choose clothing made from a fast drying fabric.
- **Number of layers:** Layering of fabrics and garments is an effective way of increasing your protection from UVR. For example, one layer is better than none and two better than one.
- **Surface area covered and product design:** An effective UV protecting fabric will not provide protection if it is made up in an inappropriate style, for example, a bikini or a baseball cap. Look for garments that cover lots of skin, for example, that have long sleeves and leg coverings, high collars and neck lines; and wide brims on hats.

Sun protective rated clothing

Sun protective products have sun protective ratings. The Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) indicates how effective a garment's fabric is at blocking out solar ultraviolet radiation. The testing is performed according to Australian/New Zealand standard AS/NZS4399 at accredited testing facilities. UPF ratings range from 15 to 50. Higher ratings indicate fabrics are more effective at blocking UV and, therefore, give better protection for the wearer of a garment made from the fabric.

- UPF15 to 24 offers good protection
- UPF25 to 39 offers very good protection
- UPF40 to 50+ offers excellent protection.

The Ultraviolet Index (UVI)

The Ultraviolet Index (UVI) is an international, scientific measure of the level of ultraviolet radiation (UVR) in the environment. The higher the UVI number the greater the risk of skin damage. The Cancer

Society advises use of sun protection and shade when the UVI is 3 or higher.

UV Index	Sun Protection
1-2 Green LOW	No protection required
3-5 Yellow MODERATE	Protection required when spending extended periods in the sun, especially if you have fair skin
6-7 Amber HIGH	Protection essential between 10am and 4pm. Slip, slop, slap and wrap.
8-10 Red VERY HIGH	Seek shade between 10am and 4pm. Slip, slop, slap and wrap. Cover up. Reapply sunscreen regularly.
11+ Purple EXTREME	Reschedule outdoor activities for early morning and evening. Full protection essential.

Check out the Sun Protection Alert on the Met Service website: www.metservice.com or in weather section of your daily newspaper. The Sun Protection Alert includes local real time advice.