

Off-the-Job Sun Safety

Exposure to the sun is one workplace hazard that is also a significant hazard outside of work. For the general public, including outdoor workers when they are not at work, exposure to the sun is the leading cause of environmentally-related cancer and is the cause of most skin cancers.¹

Outdoor workers tend to have higher recreational sun exposure than indoor workers.² They also often report not protecting themselves well when they are outdoors in their free time, for example when they are fishing or golfing.³ Adding recreational sun exposure to an outdoor worker's total sun exposure is one factor that complicates workers compensation claims for skin cancer.⁴ Recreational sun exposure is one of the reasons why there is low number of successful skin cancer claims compared with the number of skin cancers we know are associated with outdoor work.⁵

Sun exposure for your family is important – especially for kids. High levels of sun exposure during childhood is particularly associated with developing skin cancer later in life.⁶ For everyone, the more sunburns you receive, the higher your risk of skin cancer.⁷

For all of these reasons, it is important to manage your off-the-job sun exposure and sun exposure by your family. Key ways you can protect yourself and your family are included below.

Know Your Own Skin

We each have a natural skin color. This is known as our skin type or phototype. The inside of your upper arm is a good indication of your natural skin type. There are six recognized skin types:

- I and II (Celtic)
- III and IV (Mediterranean)
- V (Asian/Brown)
- VI (Black)

All skin types can get sunburned. The amount of sun exposure needed for a sunburn to develop ranges from about 10 minutes at noon in the summer for skin types I and II, up to a number of hours for skin type VI.⁸

When someone is exposed frequently to the sun, their skin adapts or gets conditioned, which results in both skin darkening (tanning) and skin thickening. However, some skin types, (for example, skin types I and II) do not tan at all or tan very lightly, and generally peel and blister following a sunburn. A tan will provide some additional protection, but it is generally not very much, and it is much less protection than most people think.

Know your own skin type and the skin types of your family members, and take this into account when planning recreational activities. People with skin types I and II are very susceptible to sunburn – they should particularly protect themselves by covering-up, wearing sunscreen, and seeking shade as much as possible.



Visit sunsafetyatwork.ca for more information.

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Self-Exams for Skin Cancer

Skin cancers that are caught early can be treated more effectively. Therefore, regular (monthly) self-examinations for potential skin cancers are recommended. To do a self-exam, look for new moles, growths or spots, and any existing ones that grow or change substantially. Skin lesions that change, itch, bleed, or don't heal are also suspicious.⁹

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer - it is important to identify melanoma early. The warning signs for melanoma are the ABCDEs and the Ugly Duckling. The ABCDEs refer to the appearance of and changes in moles, growths, and spots:¹⁰

- **A is for asymmetry:** is the shape on one side different to the shape on the other side?
- **B is for border:** is the border irregular, ragged, and imprecise?
- **C is for colour:** is there a colour variation within the mole, spot, or growth?
- **D is for diameter:** larger sized (more than 6 mm) moles, spots or growths are more dangerous,
- **E is for evolution:** is it changing in size, colour, shape or is it itchy, bleeding or tender?
- The **Ugly Duckling** refers to any moles, spots or growths that stand out as looking or feeling different from the others.¹¹ These tend to be the most suspicious and should be reported early.

To complete a skin self-exam effectively, you need to have some basic equipment, including a full length mirror, a head-held mirror, and you should be in a room with sufficient lighting. Directions on how to conduct a skin self-exam are available from the Canadian Dermatology Association: dermatology.ca. A body map and exam schedule are available from the Skin Cancer Foundation: skincancer.org.

Regular Skin Checks by Your Doctor

Have an annual skin examination completed by your family doctor. Where possible, gaining a referral to see a dermatologist is a good way of ensuring ongoing high quality screening and case management, particularly if you have any of the previously described risk factors.

Recreational Exposure

The same sun safety measures that are used at work are equally important when you are going to the beach, a swimming pool, playing soccer, having a picnic, or attending a sporting event. These include: covering-up with loose, long sleeves and pants; wearing sunglasses; wearing wide-brimmed hats; getting out of the sun whenever you can; using SPF 30 broad spectrum water-resistant sunscreen and lip balm; keeping hydrated; and not over doing it on hot days.

If you are able to plan your activities, try and stay out of the sun as much as possible, particularly between 11am and 3pm when the UV radiation is the strongest.

As a spectator at sporting events, you can be out in the sun for a long time, so be mindful of both the direct and reflected UV rays of the sun, stay hydrated, and reapply sunscreen regularly. At sporting venues, try to buy seats that have the most shade.

Protecting Your Family

Obviously your family is important. They are the reason why you go to work and want to work safely – so you can come home! Children and babies are particularly sensitive to sun exposure and rely on us as adults to keep them safe. In addition to the sun safety strategies mentioned already, things you can do to help your family be sun safe include:

- Working with your child’s daycare or school to develop a sun safety policy. This could include guidance on clothing and sunscreen, a ‘no hat no play’ rule, scheduling of outdoor activities at non-peak UV times, planting more trees and installing awnings or sails for more shade, and rules on eating lunch or taking breaks indoors or in the shade.
- Looking at ways to ensure that sun protection is as easy as possible for children and is viewed as being part of a healthy lifestyle.
- Being a good sun safety role model for your children.
- Trying to schedule family activities at times when the sun’s UV radiation is not as strong (outside of 11am and 3pm).
- Teaching children about the UV Index, the humidex, and sun safety, particularly through fun games and learning activities.

Relevant Resources

- [What’s Your Sun Safety IQ?](#) (American Cancer Society)
- [Take the Quiz: Skin Cancer](#) (American Cancer Society)
- [How to do a Skin Self-Exam \[Video\]](#) (Academy of Dermatology)
- [Five Steps to a Melanoma Self-Exam](#) (Canadian Dermatology Association)
- [How to Use a Body Map](#) (Skin Cancer Foundation)
- [Personal Risk Assessment: Heat Stress for Outdoor Workers](#) (Sun Safety at Work Canada)
- [Personal Risk Assessment: Sun and Skin Cancer for Outdoor Workers](#) (Sun Safety at Work Canada)

Games and Activities for Kids:

- [Colouring Pages](#) (Canadian Dermatology Association)
- [George the Sun Safety Superstar](#) (Skin Cancer Foundation)
- [Alex the Alligator](#) (Anne Arundel Country Maryland Department of Health)
- [Sun Safe Summer Activity Pack](#) (Skin Cancer Foundation)