

Sun protection at the snow



Visitors to the snow are at increased risk of overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation due to a combination of high altitudes and reflection of UV rays off the snow.

Think UV not heat!

Don't be fooled by the icy weather. It's the sun's UV radiation – not heat – that can cause sunburn, skin and eye damage and skin cancer. UV rays cannot be seen or felt and can damage your skin on cool or cloudy days.

Snow gear should cover most of your body, as it is designed to keep you warm, but you will need to protect your eyes and any exposed skin. To reduce your UV exposure, take breaks in the shade – especially in the middle of the day when UV levels are highest.

Slop on SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen

Apply a generous amount of sunscreen to all exposed areas of skin 20 minutes before going outside and re-apply every two hours. Snow reflects UV radiation, so make sure you apply sunscreen under your chin, beneath the tip of your nose and behind your ears.

It's a good idea to carry a small tube of sunscreen and SPF lip balm in your jacket pocket for re-application during the day.

Slide on goggles or wrap-around sunglasses

Make sure your eye protection meets Australian Standard AS:1067. If you wear prescription glasses, talk to your optometrist about getting prescription lenses fitted in your goggles or sunglasses.

Eye protection can also help to prevent snow blindness (also known as photokeratitis), which is caused when UV levels damage the outer cells of the eyeball. Snow blindness results in temporary loss of vision, and can lead to chronic eye conditions in severe cases.

What about windburn?

While wind can dry and irritate the skin, there is no such thing as windburn. The red, stinging and peeling people associate with the wind is actually a result of the sun's UV rays.

Why is UV a risk at the snow?

UV levels can be more intense at the snow because the atmosphere is thinner at higher altitude and absorbs less UV radiation. UV radiation intensity increases by about 10–12% for every 1000 metre increase in altitude.^{1,2}

Snow is also highly reflective. On a sunny day, clean fresh snow can reflect up to 90% of UV radiation.³ This means that you can be exposed to almost a double dose of UV – directly from the sun and reflected off snow-covered surfaces.

Visit sunsmart.com.au or contact SunSmart on (03) 9514 6419 for more information and resources.

References

1. Global Solar UV Index: A Practical Guide. A joint recommendation of the World Health Organization, World Meteorological Organization, United Nations Environment Programme, and the International Commission on Non-ionizing Radiation Protection, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, 2002
2. International Agency for Research on Cancer. IARC monographs - 100D. Solar and UV radiation. Lyon, France: International Agency for Research on Cancer, 2012.
- 3 Henderson S, Javorniczky J, Gies P. Spectral measurements of solar UV at several altitudes under Australian conditions. *UV Radiation and its Effects*, NIWA Research Workshop Queenstown, New Zealand. 2010.

This information is based on current available evidence at the time of review. It can be photocopied for distribution.

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