

# Toolbox talk: UV safety and skin cancer

## Key messages

- Working outdoors exposes you to up to 10 times more UV radiation than indoor workers.
- If you regularly work outdoors protection is recommended all year round, regardless of UV level.
- Both employers and workers share a 'duty of care' to reduce workplace exposure to UV radiation.
- Where possible, move tasks indoors or in the shade and take breaks in the shade, particularly in the middle of the day when UV is highest.
- Wear suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect yourself from the sun:
  - long-sleeved shirt with a collar and long pants
  - a broad-brimmed hat or a hardhat attachment
  - sunscreen
  - sunglasses or safety glasses that meet the Australian Standard.
- Check all of your skin regularly – not just sun-exposed skin.
- See your GP immediately if you notice a new or changing spot.

## Why should you care?

- More than 2,000 Australians die from skin cancers every year, but most skin cancers can be prevented. To put it in perspective, more people die from skin cancer than on our roads each year.
- If your job is outdoors you are exposed to a lot of UV at work. Outdoor workers get up to 10 times more UV exposure than indoor workers.
- UV radiation also causes serious damage to your eyes, as well as dryness, wrinkling and premature ageing of your skin.

## Risk factors

### ASK: Who is at risk of getting skin cancer?

Almost all (95%) skin cancers are caused by UV damage. Anyone can get skin cancer, but your risk is higher if you:

- work outdoors
- have fair skin that burns easily
- have many moles on your skin
- have a history of bad sunburn
- have had a skin cancer already or have a family history of skin cancer
- spend a lot of time outdoors, unprotected
- suntan, use/have used solariums.

## UV radiation

### ASK: What is UV?

- Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a form of energy that comes from the sun and some artificial sources (e.g. solariums)
- We can feel the temperature and see the sun's light, but we can't see or feel UV radiation.
- UV can be high on cool or cloudy days, so don't be fooled.
- To check what the UV level is check with the Bureau of Meteorology or the free SunSmart app.
- Sun protection is usually recommended once the UV level hits 3. However, if you work outdoors you get regular UV exposure and should use sun protection every day to stop UV damage adding up over time.



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## Legislation

UV radiation is a known cause of workplace injury and disease. Therefore, to meet health and safety requirements all businesses employing outdoor workers should address UV radiation as a workplace hazard and develop and implement control measures (including PPE) to ensure that workers are protected. Workers also have a responsibility to take care of their own health and comply with reasonable health and safety policies in relation to UV protection.

## Reduce the risk

**ASK: How could you reduce your exposure to UV radiation while working outdoors?**

### **To reduce risk wherever possible:**

- work under shade – trees or portable and permanent shade structures
- move the job indoors
- plan work so that outdoor tasks are scheduled earlier in the morning or later in the day
- take breaks indoors or in the shade
- use sun-protective PPE
- move away from or modify reflective surfaces such as water, concrete, sand, glass, roofing iron and snow
- make sure vehicles have tinted windows.

### **PPE:**

**Slip** on a long-sleeved shirt with a collar and trousers ideally made from material with an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) of 50+.

**Slop** on broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen and lip balm with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher. Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before going out in the sun and reapply every two hours.

**Slap** on a hat that shades the face, head, ears and neck. It should be broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire style (caps do not protect your neck and ears). Wear attachable brims and neck flaps when wearing a hard hat.

**Seek** shade, particularly when you take breaks.

**Slide** on wrap-around sunglasses that are close fitting and that meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067– category 2, 3 or 4 or safety glasses that meet AS/NZS 1337.1.

## Get to know your own skin

Most skin cancers (including melanoma) can be treated successfully if it is found early. By getting to know your own skin, you are more likely to notice anything new or different at an earlier stage.

Check your skin regularly and see your GP as soon as possible if you see a:

- new spot
- sore that doesn't heal
- spot that looks different from other spots around it
- spot, mole or unusual freckle that has changed in shape, size or colour  
or
- any skin spot that you are worried about.

Find out more at [sunsmart.com.au/work](https://sunsmart.com.au/work)

*Adapted from a Cancer Council NSW resource, 2018*