

## **Skin Cancer**

**Exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun is the main cause of skin cancers in Australia. Skin damage from the sun is cumulative - the longer the skin is exposed to the sun, the greater the risk of skin cancers, regardless of your tan or skin pigment.**

Rural workers have a high risk of getting skin cancers, as their work can expose them to long periods of ultraviolet radiation.

### **Spot the hazard**

To help you spot skin cancer hazards, consider:

- Lack of shade in outdoor work areas.
- Reflective surfaces, e.g. water, cement, shiny metal or white painted sheds and silos, cement surfaces.
- What jobs are done in sunlight, and how long they take.
- What are the peak sun hours.
- The day's ultraviolet exposure forecast.
- What body surfaces are exposed to sunlight.
- Whether sun block out is provided or used.
- Whether protective clothing is available and worn.

### **Assess the risk**

To assess the risk of skin cancer from identified hazards:

- Work out approximately how long is spent working outdoors each day.
- Identify what jobs are normally done in peak sun - between 10am and 4pm.
- Check whether shade is available for outdoor jobs.
- Check whether hats, protective clothing and sunscreens are adequate.
- Check whether SPF15+ sunscreen is applied to all exposed skin areas.
- Ensure sunscreen is re-applied during outdoor work.

Learn to identify various types of skin cancer, and check your skin for sunspots and unusual pigmentation.

### **Basal Cell Carcinoma**

Starts as a small lump that flattens out as it grows. One of the two most common growths, it can be easily treated and cured.

### **Squamous Cell Carcinoma**

The other most common growth; however it is more likely to spread to other parts of the body.

### **Malignant Melanoma**

The most dangerous type of skin cancer. Often starts as a dark mole. This type is responsible for over 1000 deaths in Australia each year.

### **Sunspot (Keratosis)**

A small, scaly patch of skin occurring on the arms, face, nose and ears. They are not strictly a form of cancer, but indicate excessive exposure to solar UV radiation.

Be aware of short term injury risks:

- Reddened skin, blistering, swelling, and later, peeling of the skin.
- Photosensitization - acute skin reaction to UV with certain drugs, ointments, creams, and chemicals, resulting in increased sunburn and skin damage.
- Photo conjunctivitis and photo keratitis - sore, red, gritty swollen eyes, with sensitivity to strong lights.

Long term effects include:

- Prematurely ageing - wrinkling, wasting skin tissues, excessive pigmentation, spots marked by clusters of tiny blood vessels.
- Cataracts of the eye.

### **Make the changes**

- Wear cool, protective clothing, i.e. a shady hat, shirt with collar and long sleeves, and long trousers.
- Use a sunscreen with a high sun protection factor (SPF +15) before you go into the sun.
- Noses, lips, ears, bald heads, necks and backs of hands need extra protection.
- Reapply sunscreen regularly, especially if you are sweating.
- Make use of shade areas wherever possible in the high risk hours.
- Use a tractor with shade protection fitted.
- To safeguard against cataracts, sunglasses that conform to with applicable standards are recommended.

### **Early signs**

Check your skin for early signs of skin cancer:

- Any unusual skin conditions that don't heal in four weeks;
- Any sore, ulcer or scaly patch on the skin;
- A white patch on the lips that doesn't heal;
- Any mole that seems to grow quickly;
- Any mole that changes shape or color;
- Any mole that bleeds or repeatedly itches.

If you find any of these signs, see your doctor.

**Remember:** Over-exposure to the sun's rays increases the skin cancer risk both now and in the future.