

IARC Summary Recommendations for Public Health Action

In: IARC Handbooks of Cancer Prevention: Sunscreens
International Agency for Research on Cancer, World Health Organization, Lyon 2001

- Protection of the skin from solar damage ideally involves a number of actions which include wearing tightly woven protective clothing that adequately covers the arms, trunk and legs, a hat that provides adequate shade to the whole of the head, seeking shade whenever possible, avoiding outdoor activities during periods of peak insolation and use of sunscreens. Sunscreens should not be the first choice for skin cancer prevention and should not be used as the sole agent for protection against the sun.
- Sunscreens should not be used as a means of extending the duration of solar exposure, such as prolonging sunbathing, and should not be used as a substitute for clothing on usually unexposed sites, such as the trunk and buttocks.
- Daily use of sunscreen with a high SPF (greater than 15) on usually exposed skin is recommended for residents of areas of high insolation who work outdoors or enjoy regular outdoor recreation. Daily use of a sunscreen can reduce the cumulative solar exposure that causes actinic keratoses and squamous cell carcinoma.
- Adequate solar protection is more important during childhood than at any other time in life, and the first two recommendations should be assiduously applied by parents and school managers.
- In view of the widespread use of sunscreens, even on children, stringent evaluation of their safety is necessary, particularly with regard to long-term effects. Data on the safety evaluation of sunscreens must be in the public domain so that they are available for independent scientific evaluation.
- Sunscreens should be subject to the same regulatory safety requirements as medicines.
- Once the optimal method for specifying protection against broad-spectrum UVA has been agreed, a labelling method should be introduced that is internationally congruent and understandable to the public.
- Advertising for sunscreens should promote a global sun protection strategy (see first recommendation). Advertising should avoid promoting sunscreen use for intentional exposure to the sun (e.g. acquisition of a tan), and avoid messages likely to provide a false sense of security for people using sunscreens.
- Health promotion interventions should be designed to increase the appropriate and effective use of sunscreens by the general public and subgroups at particular risk for skin cancer because of their phenotype or a predisposition to intentional solar exposure.

- A warning should be displayed on bottles of sunscreens informing consumers of the second recommendation.