

FAQ for Facilitators: SunSmart Toolbox Talk for Outdoor Workers

Key messages

- UV radiation increases the risk of skin cancer and eye damage. UV radiation comes from the sun and artificial sources such as sunbeds.
- Working outdoors exposes you to between 2-3 times more UV radiation than indoor workers, putting you at increased risk of skin cancer and eye damage.
- If you regularly work outdoors you should consider using sun protection all year-round because UV damage builds up over time.
- Both employers and workers can take action to reduce workplace exposure to UV radiation.
- Where possible, plan to do your work outdoors early in the morning or late afternoon to avoid the peak UV sunrays. Use trees or portable shade for break times and lunch.
- Follow the Healthy Ireland SunSmart 5 S's to reduce your risk of skin cancer – **Slip** on clothing, **Slop** on sunscreen SPF 30+ for adults, **Slap** on a wide-brimmed hat, **Seek** shade and **Slide** on sunglasses.
- Check all of your skin regularly – not just sun-exposed skin. See your GP without delay if you notice changes to your skin, for example a new dark spot on your skin, or a change to a mole that you already have.

Why is skin cancer prevention important?

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland, with almost 13,000¹ new cases (melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer combined) diagnosed each year.

Between the years 2015 and 2045, the average number of people diagnosed with both melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) each year is projected to increase².

The average age at diagnosis of melanoma skin cancer is younger than for many other cancers. There is a higher proportion of males and females diagnosed with melanoma skin cancer under the age of 50 compared to other cancers².

Skin cancer is largely preventable by protecting skin from UV radiation and not using sunbeds.

If you work outdoors you may be exposed to a lot of UV at work. Outdoor workers can be exposed to between 2-3 times more UV radiations than indoor workers, putting them at increased risk of skin cancer³.

1. National Cancer Registry of Ireland. (2022). Cancer in Ireland 1994-2020: Annual statistical report 2022. www.ncri.ie

2. National Cancer Registry of Ireland. (2019). Cancer incidence projections for Ireland 2020-2045. www.ncri.ie

3. Peters, C. E., Koehoorn, M. W., Demers, P. A., Nicol, A. M., & Kalia, S. (2016). Outdoor Workers' Use of Sun Protection at Work and Leisure. Safety and health at work, 7(3), 208– 212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shaw.2016.01.006>

What is UV radiation?

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a form of energy that comes from the sun and some artificial sources such as sunbeds. 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, which is why it is important to use sun protection even on cloudy days. Sun protection is usually recommended once the UV level hits 3 or above. However, if you work outdoors you get regular UV exposure and should consider using sun protection every day to stop UV damage adding up over time.

What are the harmful health effects of UV radiation?

Exposure to UV radiation can damage the skin and eyes⁴. Short-term damage can be visible, presenting as skin reddening, sunburn or a suntan, while other damage may take years to develop, such as premature ageing of the skin and skin cancer⁵.

What can you do as an employee to reduce your risk of skin cancer?

1. **Slip on clothing** – Wear clothes that cover as much skin as possible such as long sleeves and collared shirts.
2. **Slop on sunscreen** – Apply plenty of sunscreen with SPF 30 plus, or more, labelled 'broad spectrum' (offering protection against UVA and UVB) and is 'water resistant'. Reapply regularly (especially after swimming, sweating, or towel drying).
3. **Slap on a wide brimmed hat** that shades your face, neck and ears or a construction helmet with a brim and a neck flap.
4. **Seek shade** – Work in the shade if possible under trees, portable and permanent shade structures. If you can, adjust work schedules to limit time in the mid-day sun. Plan work so that outdoor tasks are scheduled earlier in the morning or later in the day.
5. **Slide on sunglasses** – Wear UV protective sunglasses or safety glasses. Choose sunglasses that are close fitting/wrap-around style.

How will I know if I have skin cancer?

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 without delay if you notice changes to your skin, for example:

- A change in the size, shape or colour of a mole that you already have.
- A mole that is often itchy or bleeding.
- A new mole that looks different to the other moles that you have.
- A change to a normal patch of your skin, like a new dark spot on your skin.
- A dark coloured line or patch under your nail, or any abnormal skin under your nail.

4. Yam, J. C., & Kwok, A. K. (2014). Ultraviolet light and ocular diseases. *International ophthalmology*, 34(2), 383–400.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10792-013-9791-x>

5. World Health Organization, World Meteorological Organization, United Nations Environment Programme & International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection. (2002). *Global solar UV index: a practical guide*. World Health Organization.
<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42459>