

OUTDOOR WORKERS:

Be Sun Safe

Proper sun protection is important if you spend time outdoors and are exposed to ultraviolet radiation from the sun. Excessive ultraviolet radiation (UV) exposure can cause damage to your skin and eyes as well as premature aging of the skin. It can also affect your immune system.

Ultraviolet A rays (UVA) make up most of the sun's natural light. They can penetrate deep into the skin causing wrinkles and aging. Ultraviolet B rays (UVB) are the most damaging to our skin. They are the main cause of sunburns as they are nearly 100 times stronger than UVA rays.

A suntan is not a sign of health. It indicates that your skin has been damaged. Your skin never forgets all of the sun's rays that you've been exposed to in your lifetime - it all adds up to create an accumulative negative impact on the health of your skin. The most serious consequence of chronic sun exposure is skin cancer (Canadian Cancer Society, 2009).

Risk factors for skin cancer

The risk factors associated with the development of skin cancer include:

- Light coloured skin, eyes or hair
- Skin that freckles easily and/or has a large number of moles
- Family history of skin cancer
- Recipient of an organ transplant
- Several blistering sunburns as a child
- Use of certain drugs or cosmetics that make you more sensitive to ultraviolet radiation
- Working outdoors
- Participating in outdoor activities and outdoor sports

Did you know?

Your skin can get burned on a cloudy day. Up to 80 per cent of the sun's rays can pass through light clouds, mist and fog. You will get more UV exposure on cement or water since these surfaces reflect the sun's rays back on your skin just like a mirror. This harmful reflection can happen even if you are in nearby shade.

Sun safety recommendations for outdoor workers:

- Use a sunscreen and lip balm with a SPF 30 or higher and with UVA/UVB protection
 - Apply sunscreen 20-30 minutes before going outside
 - Re-apply every 2-3 hours and after heavy sweating
 - Pay special attention to ensure coverage of ears, nose and neck

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- Wear clothing to protect as much of your skin as possible
 - Long sleeved shirts and long pants are recommended
 - Tightly woven fabrics that block the sun's rays are best
- Wear a hat with a wide brim or a neck protector
- Wear sunglasses with 100% UV protection that:
 - Block both UVA and UVB radiation
 - Fit snugly to your face (even when perspiring)
 - Have wraparound frames for additional protection
- Review Canada's UV Index daily to guide your sun safety practices
 - The UV Index is issued daily by Environment Canada and measures the intensity of the sun's ultraviolet radiation
 - The UV Index is featured in the media (print, TV, radio and internet) daily when it is expected to reach 3 or higher
 - When the UV Index is 3 or higher it is recommended to take precautions: cover up, wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen - especially when outdoors for 30 minutes or more and look for shade near midday when the sun is strongest
- Limit your time in the sun between 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. whenever your work assignments permit
 - Seek shade at every opportunity. Sit in shaded areas during work breaks such as under trees, awnings, or in vehicles
- Drink plenty of non-caffeinated fluids to reduce your risk for heat stroke and heat exhaustion

Skin self-examination

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in Canada. It is, however, preventable and treatable when detected early. Be familiar with your own skin so that you can recognize any changes. Examine your skin every month to detect early warning signs of skin cancer. Once you know the pattern of your moles, blemishes, freckles and other marks on your skin, you will be able to detect any changes.

If you notice any changes, make an appointment with your health care professional.

For more information on Sun Safety, please contact York Region *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653**

