

Reducing your risk of skin cancer

The role of clothing in sun protection

Key point

- Wearing protective clothing and hats is one of the best ways to protect your skin from the damaging effects of ultraviolet (UV) radiation.
- Choose clothing that:
 - No caps
 - Covers as much skin as possible
 - Is made of tightly woven fabric
 - Is a dark colour.

The great cover-up

Wearing clothing and hats is one of the most effective ways to protect your skin from the sun. Clothing provides a barrier between your skin and damaging ultraviolet (UV) radiation for as long as you are wearing it and – unlike sunscreen – can't be wiped or washed off!

Some clothing – such as work and sports uniforms, rash vests and swimwear – are especially designed for sun protection. However, many clothes in your wardrobe will also provide you with good protection. When selecting sun-protective clothing and hats, consider the following aspects:

Style

For best protection, choose:

- Shirts with collars or high necks, and sleeves
- Trousers or longer shorts and skirts that come to below the knees
- Clothing that is loose rather than stretched across the skin
- A wide-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire-style hat to protect the face, neck and ears. For adults, the brim should be at least 7.5cm or more, and for children, it should be 6cm. For children under 10 years of age, the brim should be proportional to the size of the child's head and provide shade for the whole face.
- Baseball caps are not recommended, as they do not protect the ears, cheeks or neck.

Fabric

- Look for fabric that has a close, dense weave. Hold the garment up to the light. The less light that passes through the fabric, the better protection it will provide.
- Synthetics or mixed fabrics often have a tighter weave than natural fabrics – however, some natural fabrics such as cotton, hemp and linen can also have a tight weave, and are lightweight and cool to wear.
- Protection may be reduced if the fabric is stretched (i.e. a tight fit, or knitted or elasticised fabrics), wet or old and worn.
- Raffia and straw hats should be finely woven and should not allow pinpricks of sunlight to pass through.

Colour

- Dark colours (such as navy, black and dark red) absorb UV rays, and prevent them from reaching the skin better than white and light colours. However, closeness of the weave is still more important than colour of the fabric.
- Avoid light-coloured hat brims that bounce sunlight back onto the face.

Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF)

Fabric and clothing may be labelled with an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF). The UPF is a scale developed to rate how much UV protection a fabric provides.

Fabric doesn't have to be UPF rated to provide good protection and it's important to remember that the UPF rating doesn't apply to the style or design of the garment. Clothing that is likely to have a UPF rating includes school uniforms, swimwear and clothing designed for outdoor workers. For more information, visit www.arpansa.gov.au/services/upf/index.cfm.

The Australian/New Zealand Standard for Sun Protective Clothing (AS/NZS 4399:1996) describes procedures used for measuring the UPF of fabrics and requirements for labelling UPF-rated clothing.

The table below shows the rating system.

Protection category	UPF ratings	Amount of UV radiation blocked
Excellent protection	40, 45, 50, 50+	More than 97.5%
Very good protection	25, 30, 35	96.0% to 97.4%
Good protection	15, 20	93.3% to 95.9%

For more information, visit www.standards.com.au.

Any fabric rated above UPF15 provides good protection against UV radiation.

Swimsuits, rash vests, shorts, hats, tops and other active-wear rated UPF50+ are readily available, and are designed to be cool, comfortable and practical to wear.

For more information on skin cancer prevention and sun protection visit our website:

www.cancercouncil.org.au/sunsmart.

Cancer Council NSW recommends that when the **UV Index** is 3 or above, you should protect your skin in five ways:

- Slip on clothing that covers your arms and legs
- Slop on 30+ broad-spectrum sunscreen
- Slap on a broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire hat
- Seek shade
- Slide on wrap-around sunglasses.

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