

THINK UV, NOT HEAT!

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Introduction

Australia has the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world, a preventable disease caused primarily by exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) in sunlight. Health promotion strategies play a significant role in sun protection.

Method

A cross-sectional study was performed using questionnaires completed at corporate skin checks in Melbourne, Victoria. This was conducted on 668 participants during 2011 to 2013.

Results

Over a quarter (n=170, 25.4%) of participants did not understand that sunburning was related to high levels of UVR, which occur in summer. Almost a fifth (n=122, 18%) associated the heat of February with highest UVR. One hundred and seventy (25.4%) participants either mentioned the period May-August when UVR is negligible in Melbourne or had no idea, including saying "all year round". There was no significant difference in this knowledge between genders and between different age groups. Understanding these concepts is important for Australians residing in cooler parts of southern Australia, as UVR levels may be high and yet the temperature may be relatively cool.

Conclusion

From a public health perspective, there needs to be more emphasis on UVR in sun awareness campaigns in order to prompt sun protective behaviours. It is also vital for dermatologists have an understanding of UVR concepts and incorporate such patient education into their routine skin assessments, as well as communicating the complex message regarding obtaining adequate solar-induced Vitamin D, providing advice on the early detection of skin cancers and recommending routine self-examination.