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Scots worst in UK for sun protection

Children put at risk from rays and skin cancer cases on rise as parents fail to apply cream

Emma Cowling

SCOTTISH parents are less likely to safeguard their children with sun protection products than parents elsewhere in the UK, according to a shocking new survey.

Despite high rates of skin cancers and related conditions north of the Border, the survey found that Scottish adults are 50 per cent less likely to always put sun cream on their children.

The survey also discovered that Scots are 17 per cent less likely to regard ultraviolet rays as a risk to them or their children, and 50 per cent less likely to wear sun cream before setting off in the car.

"These statistics point towards the need for greater education in Scotland to boost awareness of the risks of UVA and change entrenched attitudes towards skin protection," said a spokesman for the research team.

Melanoma is the most common cancer in 15 to 24-year-olds in Scotland and the most frequent cause of cancer-related deaths in women in their 20s.

Yinka Ebo, Cancer Research UK's senior health information officer, said that the responsibility to protect children was that of the parents. "Children are often too busy running around to worry about sunburn, but parents can prevent their children's skin being damaged when young. Children have thinner, more delicate skins than adults and are at higher risk of burning – and we know that sunburn can increase the risk of skin cancer in later life," she said.

"Applying sun cream is one important way to protect children's skin, but parents can also make sure that children wear hats and T-shirts and spend some time in the shade when the sun is at its strongest."

Bevis Man, of the British Skin Foundation, said that many Scots were unaware of the damage the sun and UVA rays can do.

"There is a general misconception that the sun in Scotland and the UK isn't as strong as those in more tropical or hotter climates, but the truth is that it can certainly be more than enough to cause sunburn and long-term damage to the skin," he said.

"It's an awareness issue, and a myth that we need to debunk. People in Scotland, particularly those with fair skin in the 'high risk' sector of the population, need to follow the usual sun safety measures, whether they're spending time outside in the UK or on a sunny beach abroad."

Leigh Smith, chair of skin cancer charity Melanoma Action and Support Scotland, said attitudes towards the sun in Scotland were deeply entrenched.

"We Celts burn because of our fair skin and hair, so we really should be taking precautions, but quite often we don't," she said.

"We try to get across to parents that when it comes to children they need to provide shade, use sunhats, and particularly be careful with babies in buggies, encouraging them to use parasols and not keep their children in the types of buggies that allow maximum exposure to the elements.



Scottish parents are 50 per cent less likely to always put sun cream on their children than those elsewhere in the UK, according to a new survey. Photograph: Jayne Wright

"But I've stood on Scottish golf courses trying to persuade intelligent professional men they need to put sun cream on and have them say 'Of course we don't, it's too cold. How can the sun possibly harm us in this weather?' There really is still a lot of ignorance about the situation."

Incidents of malignant melanoma in Scotland have risen by more than 68 per cent in men and 71 per cent in women in the past ten years, making it one of the worst areas in the UK for developing the disease. The General Register Office for Scotland reported that the number of patients dying from skin cancer has risen by 20 per cent since 2008.

Ebo said that using sun protection didn't have to be a complicated process but it was important to apply it correctly.

"It is best to use waterproof

sun cream because it will wear off more slowly," she said. "For children to get the best protection, sun cream should be reapplied at least every two hours – and more frequently if

it is washed, rubbed or sweated off. Sun cream should be at least factor 15 and applied thickly. Use golf ball-sized dollops for small children."

The survey was carried out by Solar Gard, which makes window films that block dangerous UVA light coming in from car windows. The report showed that only four in 100 Scots applied sun cream before making a car journey.

"Almost half the UK population is aware that UVA rays pose a risk to themselves and their children while travelling in the car, yet applying sun cream before embarking on car journeys is not common practice in the UK," said a Solar Gard spokesperson.

Tayside a cancer 'hotspot'

TAYSIDE has been named as Scotland's skin cancer "hotspot", with cases rising fourfold over the past 30 years.

Dr Charlotte Proby of Dundee University said the east coast's long hours of sunshine, fair skin and young women increasingly using tanning salons could be to blame for the figures.

Other areas of the UK where

skin cancer is prevalent include the Scottish Borders and the English south coast.

Proby, the university's clinical reader in dermatology, has been investigating the more aggressive forms of skin cancer for three years with a £165,752 grant from the Association for International Cancer Research.

Cucumber E coli outbreak hits Britain

Nick Eardley

AN E COLI outbreak believed to be caused by contaminated cucumbers has spread to Britain, with three cases confirmed in German nationals.

The outbreak has killed at least two people and left hundreds ill. The Scottish Government is monitoring the situation after three cases of the infection were reported in England.

A Scottish Government spokesperson last night said: "The Food Standards Agency is monitoring this issue and is liaising closely with the European Commission. There is currently no evidence that any affected organic cucumbers from the sources identified have been distributed to the UK."

Authorities in Germany have advised people not to eat cucumbers and to avoid other raw vegetables until they have concluded investigations into the cause of the outbreak. People in Sweden and Denmark have also been hit by the bug.

The strain, hemolytic-uremic syndrome, affects the blood and kidneys. In severe cases, it can hit the central nervous system.

The Health Protection Agency said its German counterparts had identified organic cucumbers from Almeria and Malaga as one source of the outbreak.

But further investigations are studying a batch from the Netherlands as a potential third source. There is no evidence the outbreak has affected any produce imported into the UK.

However, it warned anybody returning from Germany with illness should seek medical attention.