

Why a sunny day spells danger

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Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in Ireland, with over 13,000 cases of skin cancer diagnosed annually. You can do a lot to reduce the risk. CSO figures (2018) suggest that almost one in four (26.6%) of skin cancer deaths are related to the construction, outdoor and farming industries. One death every week in Ireland is at least partly due to sun exposure at work.

We live in a cloudy, often rainy, country. Why be concerned?

Farmers are one of the highest-risk groups for skin cancer. Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is damaging all year around, even on cool, cloudy days. Farmers are at risk because they spend a large amount of time outdoors. Overexposure to UV can cause sunburn, skin and eye damage and skin cancer.

What does UV light do?

Dr Triona McCarthy, consultant in public health medicine, National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP), explains how UV rays affect your skin: "As with many cancers, malignant melanoma skin cancer develops when cells are damaged and grow uncontrollably. Exposure to [UV] rays from the sun, even on cloudy days, or from artificial sources like sunbeds, is the most common cause of skin cancer."

Earlier research by Dr Breda Smyth indicates that farmers have three times higher cancer mortality than blue/white collar workers, with skin cancer being a major source.

What can farmers do to avoid skin cancer?

Getting sun burnt increases your risk of melanoma skin cancer, the most serious form of the disease. While being burnt is very damaging, long-term exposure without burning can



Melanoma.



Protect your skin from the sun

also significantly increase the risk of skin cancer.

If you work outdoors, you are exposed to two to three times more UV than someone who works indoors, so you have a higher risk of developing skin cancer. Exposure to UV damage is irreversible, permanent and cumulative with each exposure. Review your UV exposure – how long are you outside during the day and how many days of the week?

When is the highest risk?

When the UV index is 3 and above, you need to protect your skin, even if it is cloudy. UV from the sun is strongest between 11am and 3pm – plan for this in your daily schedule if possible and try to take lunch breaks or work in the shade at this time. UV is strongest between April and September. You can check the UV index on the Met Éireann website and app (see www.met.ie/uv-index).

How can you protect yourself when outdoors?

Never rely on sunscreen alone. Use protective clothing that covers your exposed skin, such as long sleeves, collared shirts, wide brimmed hats

and sunglasses (wraparounds are best). To help protect your skin, use broad spectrum water-resistant Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 30+ and apply every two hours.

How can you catch skin cancer early?

Check your skin regularly for changes and contact your GP if you notice a lump or discoloured patch. Look out for a new growth or sore that does not heal in a few weeks, a spot or sore that itches, hurts, crusts, scabs or bleeds, constant skin ulcers with no other explanation for their cause and new or changing moles.

If you would like more information about supporting outdoor workers to be sunsmart, contact prevention@cancercontrol.ie or check out www.hse.ie/cancer and www.cancer.ie.

