



## Media Release

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### **Cancer Council warns against use of aerosol sunscreens**

#### Alarming new research shows aerosol sunscreens are putting Aussies at risk of sunburn

With summer days ahead, Cancer Council together with the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency is urging Australians to avoid using aerosol sunscreens off the back of new research indicating that it is extremely difficult to get good levels of UV protection from these products, leaving many Aussies at risk of sunburn.

Research conducted by QUT (Queensland University of Technology) into nine popular commercially available aerosol sunscreen products showed spray times required to achieve the level of UV protection as stated on the aerosol ranged from 4- to 14- seconds per limb or 29- to 98 seconds for a full body application.

Importantly, this was in controlled laboratory conditions - it would be significantly longer when used in everyday situations such as the beach. In addition, some aerosol products contained less than half sunscreen, with the rest propellant. This means consumers have no way of knowing how much sunscreen they're actually purchasing making correct application almost impossible.

Head of SunSmart, Heather Walker said the research was alarming as the effectiveness of sunscreen depends on correct application. With such variation across brands, consumers would be hard pressed to know how much aerosol sunscreen to use.

"The quantity of propellant in aerosol sunscreen dilutes the amount of sunscreen dispensed and increases the amount of product needed to achieve adequate SPF coverage.

"The packaging advises consumers to 'use liberally' or 'apply generously' which is open to interpretation and leaves them vulnerable. This is particularly worrying with the extreme UV levels we see in summer around the country.

"Our advice in the first instance is to avoid using aerosol sunscreen products, however if it is your preference, then exercise great caution. Even literally saturating your body with the product may not provide the level of protection you expect.



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“Regardless of sunscreen type, sunscreen should always be considered the last line of defence after protective clothing, a broad-brim hat, wrap-around sunglasses and shade,” Ms Walker said.

Dr Rick Tinker, Director of Assessment and Advice for ARPANSA said the research suggests that consumers may need to use greater amounts of aerosol sunscreen compared to a lotion or a cream to achieve the same level of protection from UV.

“The study estimated how many applications one product could provide to an adult body (35gms). Three of the aerosols tested could only adequately cover two full body applications – not enough to protect a family.

“To account for the variations between aerosol brands, the product would also need to be applied in larger quantities to be on the safe side. Using a cream or a lotion is likely to be a more reliable way of ensuring adequate coverage is achieved,” Dr Tinker said.

Cancer Council recommends covering exposed skin with protective clothing and a broad-brim hat. For any uncovered skin, apply SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water resistant sunscreen. Use seven teaspoons of sunscreen for an adult full body application: one teaspoon for each arm and leg, one for the front of the torso, one for the back, and one for the face, neck and ears. Sunscreen should be applied 20 minutes before going outside and reapplied every two hours, or more if swimming, sweating or towel-drying.

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Every year nearly 2,000 people die from skin cancer and the Australian Government estimates that in 2020, nearly one person every thirty minutes will be diagnosed with melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. Despite its prevalence, skin cancer is almost entirely preventable with good sun protection.

SunSmart recommends all five forms of sun protection be used when the UV is 3 and above and advises consumers to opt for a sunscreen cream or lotion to be assured of adequate protection:

- **Slip** on loose protective clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
- **Slop** on SPF30 (or higher), broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen 20 minutes before going outdoors. Use a teaspoon of SPF30 (or higher), broad-spectrum, water resistant sunscreen per limb. This equates to around 7 teaspoons for a full body application. Reapply every two hours. Use a cream or lotion or exercise caution if opting to use an aerosol sunscreen.
- **Slap** on a broad-brim, bucket or legionnaire hat that shades the face, neck and ears.
- **Seek** shade wherever possible outside.



- **Slide** on close-fitting, wrap-around sunglasses that cover as much of the eye area as possible and meet the Australian Standard.

View the report [‘Testing and Evaluating Aerosol Sunscreens’](#).

**ENDS**

### **About the research:**

Nine commercially available aerosol sunscreen products underwent laboratory testing during August 2020-Sept 2020 by QUT. The amount of propellant contained in each product was assessed and flow rate experiments were undertaken to determine how long each product needed to be sprayed to reach an adequate coverage of sunscreen. All products were commercially available in Australia.

The report was prepared by the Queensland University of Technology, with advice and assistance from Cancer Council Victoria and the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency.

### **Note to editor**

Cancer Council previously sold an aerosol sunscreen however it was discontinued in 2017 due to concerns about correct application.



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