

Sun protection at the snow

Key point

- Ultraviolet (UV) radiation levels are higher in alpine regions than at sea level.
- UV radiation cannot be seen or felt. Even when the temperature is low, UV radiation is present and can cause sunburn and skin damage.
- When the UV Index is 3 or above protect your skin in five ways:
 - Slip on protective clothing that covers the skin including long sleeves and high neckline or collar.
 - Slop on SPF30+ broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen and re-apply every two hours.
 - Slap on a hat or beanie that covers your head and ears.
 - Seek shade when taking a break.
 - Slide on or wrap-around sunglasses or goggles.

We all know how important it is to protect our skin from the sun in summer, but it can be just as important to be sun-safe in winter – especially if you're heading to the snow.

It's easy to get sunburnt at the snow. Snow is highly reflective and ultraviolet (UV) levels can be high even when the temperature is cold and frosty. Remember the more you are exposed to UV radiation, whether it's at the beach or on the slopes, the greater your risk of developing skin cancer.

Why is UV radiation a risk at the snow?

- UV radiation levels are more intense at high altitude than at low altitude (sea level) because the air is cleaner and there is less atmosphere to absorb harmful UV rays. UV levels increase by 10–12% with every 1,000-metre increase in altitude. There is up to 30% more UV radiation at Mt Perisher (2,054 metres) and Thredbo (2,037 metres) than at sea level.
- Snow is highly reflective. On a sunny day, clean fresh snow can reflect as much as 80% of UV radiation. This means that UV radiation not only reaches you directly, it also reaches you indirectly when it is scattered and reflected by the snow.

How to protect your skin

Ski gear is already designed to cover most of your body to keep you warm, but don't forget the bits that aren't covered. Remember these tips:

- UV levels are usually highest in the middle of the day. Think about taking a break from the slopes then, either indoors or in the shade.
- Keep your head covered with a balaclava or a beanie with flaps to protect your ears.
- Apply a generous quantity of SPF 30+ broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen to all exposed areas of skin (face, throat, back of the neck, ears and backs of hands if you are not wearing gloves) 20 minutes before going outside. Remember that snow reflects UV rays, so make sure you apply sunscreen under your chin, beneath the tip of your nose and behind your ears.
- Apply SPF30+, broad-spectrum lip balm or zinc cream to your lips.
- Carry small tubes of sunscreen and lip balm so you can reapply every two hours throughout the day.

- If skiing in spring, when conditions begin to warm up, you may have more skin exposed. Apply sunscreen liberally to all exposed areas and wear tops with long sleeves and a high neck or collar.
- Many people confuse sunburn with windburn, which occurs when strong wind strips the skin's natural oils. While windburnt skin may feel red and irritated, much like the effects of sunburn, windburn does not cause long-term skin damage and skin cancer. The moisturisers in sunscreen can help to relieve the effects of windburn.

How to protect your skin

Snow blindness – sunburn on the surface of the eye – is a real risk at the snow. The condition is usually temporary and may last only a few days, but it can be very painful and contribute to long-term damage, such as cataracts.

To protect your eyes from glare and reflected UV radiation:

- Wear wrap-around sunglasses or snug-fitting goggles. Check the tag to ensure glasses or goggles meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067:2003
- If you wear prescription glasses, talk to your optometrist about getting prescription lenses fitted in your sunglasses or goggles.

Protecting children at the snow

Exposure to UV radiation in the first 15 years can greatly increase a child's risk of developing skin cancer later in life, so it's vital to protect their skin on the slopes:

- Apply SPF30+, broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen liberally to their exposed skin 20 minutes before they go outside. Give your children small tubes of SPF30+ sunscreen and lip balm so they can reapply throughout the day.
- Ensure children's eyes are protected by good quality goggles or glasses. For safety, children's glasses or goggles should have plastic (not glass) lenses. Eyewear for children and teenagers should meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS1067:2003. Toy and/or fashion spectacles may not provide adequate protection.
- If the weather is warming up and your children are wearing lighter clothing, make sure they still have long sleeves and high necklines.
- Children's headwear should protect their ears as well as their heads.
- Be a good role model for your children – actions speak louder than words.

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.

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

www.cancerCouncil.com.au/sunsmart.