

Latest figures show melanoma at highest ever level in Victoria

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New figures from The Cancer Council Victoria show that the number of Victorians affected by melanoma is at the highest level ever. Latest figures from the Victorian Cancer Registry show that in 2005, melanoma overtook lung cancer and is now the fourth most common cause of cancer in Victorians.

In Victoria in 2005, 2,347 Victorians were diagnosed with melanoma. This represents an increase of 388 cases from the previous year's figures. A total of 245 Victorians died from melanoma in 2005, compared to the previous year.

SunSmart Manager Kylie Strong says the latest figures are signs of a concerning trend.

"These latest figures do confirm that melanoma is on the increase in Victoria, in both men and women. Based on these latest figures, on average 6 Victorians a day are diagnosed with melanoma."

"Analysis of the latest figures show that the increase is largely in people aged 60 and over, and those aged 40-59. However, we're pleased to see that trends in people under 40 remain stable."

Around three quarters (1475) of the new cases in 2005 were early stage melanoma (lesions of less than 1mm), so while it's concerning that the trend data shows melanoma is increasing, it's also encouraging that the large proportion of new cases are early stage, where the likelihood of successful treatment is higher.

However, Ms Strong cautioned that melanoma is only the 'tip of the skin cancer iceberg'.

"We must remember that the problem of skin cancer in Victoria is much larger than just melanoma. There are estimated to be nearly 40,000 new cases of non melanoma skin cancers such as squamous cell and basal carcinoma every year. And while melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer, non melanoma skin cancer can also cause death or disfigurement."

Ms Strong cautioned Victorians that while summer has officially come to an end, UV radiation levels are still high right around the state.

"UV levels are still high enough to cause skin damage, and will continue to be until around May. There is a strong association in many people's minds between hot weather and the risk of sunburn, however many people get sunburnt when the temperature is between 18-27 degrees, so sun protection is still very important at this time of year."

"With many Victorians planning a break over the forthcoming Easter and school holidays, we want to remind people that they still need to protect themselves from skin cancer in five ways, with sun protective clothing, a hat, sunscreen, sunglasses and shade - using just one of these measures on its own is not enough," she said.

Data released by the Cancer Council recently found that on average 360,000 Victorian adults get sunburnt on an average summer weekend.

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Available for interview: Kylie Strong, Manager, SunSmart

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