

# How to protect yourself from the sun's harmful UV rays

July 19 2021, by Ileana Varela

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Sun, sun, sun. The weather is one of the top reasons many of us live in Florida. But too much exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause skin cancer, the most common type of cancer. The American

Cancer Society estimates that more than 5 million skin cancers are diagnosed each year in the United States. That's more than if you add up all cancers.

"Fortunately, there are many ways in which we can protect ourselves and minimize the risk," said Dr. Mercedes Florez-White, a dermatologist at FIU Health and associate professor of dermatology at the FIU Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine. "The problem is many people don't protect themselves."

A 2021 survey by the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) found that a third of Americans lack a basic understanding of [skin cancer](#) and sun protection.

"Something as simple as seeking shade whenever possible can go a long way toward preventing skin cancer," said Florez-White.

But the AAD survey found that more than half (53 percent) of adults are unaware that shade can protect them from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays.

According to the AAD survey, "Gen Z (those born after 1996) appeared to have the biggest misunderstanding of the dangers of sun exposure and skin cancer, followed closely by Millennials (those born between 1981-1996)."

So what's your sun safety IQ? [Take this quick quiz from the American Cancer Society.](#)

Here are four tips to reduce your sun exposure and risk of skin cancer.

- Seek shade—especially from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are the strongest.

- Use sunscreen—apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 for daily use. An SPF of 50 or higher is best for [outdoor activities](#), direct sun exposure, or if you have fair skin. Reapply every two hours or after swimming or sweating.
- Use mineral sunscreens, also called physical or organic, for children, sensitive skin, or if you are prone to developing [dark spots](#) (hyperpigmentation).
- Wear proper clothing—long-sleeved shirts, pants, and a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses. Yes, your eyes also need protection!
- Wear sunglasses—Yes, your eyes also need protection! Get sunglasses that block 100% of UVA and UVB rays.

Everyone is at risk of [skin cancer](#) regardless of age, gender, or race. So protect yourself and your family from the sun.

Provided by Florida International University

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