

Skin-cancer warning: Observing sun-protective behaviors at outdoor sporting events

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Credit: [Aranxa Esteve](#)/Unsplash

Researchers observing the crowd at Townsville's V8 supercars events say many people are sun smart—but women are wearing the wrong hats.

Dr. Simone Harrison is a principal research fellow at James Cook University's College of Public Health & Tropical Medicine. She said the incidence of skin cancer in Australia and New Zealand is much higher than in other countries with predominantly fair-skinned populations such as the U.S., U.K. and Canada.

"The burden to the Australian health care system is massive, with direct health care costs borne by the Government for all patients newly diagnosed with melanoma accounting for \$AUD 397.9 million and \$AUD 426.2 million for (generally not life-threatening) keratinocyte carcinomas in 2021, making skin cancer the costliest of all cancers nationally," said Dr. Harrison.

She said approximately 95% of melanomas can be prevented by avoiding overexposure to [ultraviolet radiation](#), but despite sun-safety campaigns conducted in Australia since the 1980s, skin [cancer](#) incidence has continued to rise in all but the youngest groups of people.

Researchers observed a total of 1337 racegoers at the 2009 and 2013 Supercars events in Townsville, most of whom had lightly pigmented [skin](#), and tallied those who wore hats and sun smart clothing. The findings are published in the journal *Photochemistry and Photobiology*.

"Over 70% of people wore a hat, but the use of sun-protective styles (wide-brimmed/bucket/legionnaires) decreased from 29.2% to 18.6% between the two events, primarily because the use of sun-protective hats halved (from 28.7% to 14.0%) among females—who were less likely than men to wear any hat at all," said Dr. Harrison.

She said relatively few people wore sun-protective (three-quarter-length or full-length) sleeves, but their use more than doubled between 2009 (10.5%) and 2013 (22.5%).

The researchers found more than 82% of males but only just over 69% of females wore sunglasses to protect their eyes at the 2013 event.

Dr. Harrison said the findings highlight the need for continued efforts toward [skin cancer primary prevention](#) through sun protection and, given Australians' love of sport and the outdoors, with a dedicated focus on outdoor sporting settings.

"Without continued action to improve prevention and early detection, it's estimated that between 2022 and 2030 a further 205,000 Australians will be diagnosed with melanoma, 14,000 of whom will die, resulting in costs of \$AUD 8.7 billion and 136,000 years of life lost, even before considering those affected by keratinocyte carcinomas," said Dr. Harrison.

More information: Ben Dexter et al, Serial Cross-Sectional Observations of Sun-Protective Behaviors at an Annual Outdoor Motorsport Event in Tropical Queensland, Australia, *Photochemistry and Photobiology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/php.13773](https://doi.org/10.1111/php.13773)

Provided by James Cook University

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