

Australians have world's highest rate of skin cancer: study

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Australia's sun worshipping culture means the country's 22 million people are 13 times more likely to develop skin cancer than the global average, according to a new study released Thursday.

The "Cancer in Australia 2010" report compiled by a government agency revealed that the sun-drenched and beach-loving nation has the globe's highest rate of deadly melanoma and one of the highest overall rates of cancer.

[Melanoma](#) -- the most virulent form of [skin cancer](#) -- is caused by harmful ultraviolet light from the sun.

Australia's proximity to Antarctica, where there is a hole in the ozone layer that filters out UV rays, also increases the risk.

However, higher rates of detection and tracking also explain the number of cases of cancer diagnosed each year, according to lead researcher Christine Sturrock from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

"The fact we are very good at tracking cancers goes some way to explaining this, as most other countries are not as good," Sturrock told AFP.

"But we have the highest rate of skin cancer in the world."

The overall number of Australians being diagnosed with cancer

increased by 27 percent between 1982 and 2007, even taking population growth into account, due in part to the country's [ageing population](#).

However, death rates from the disease have fallen by 16 percent in the same period, which Sturrock said was the one of the most pleasing findings from the report, which analysed cancer data from across the country.

"One of the most positive findings to emerge was the dramatic decrease in deaths from cancers," she said.

The report also identified an increased incidence of lymphoid cancers, [prostate cancer](#) and [breast cancer](#) among people living in higher socio-economic areas. However, Sturrock said the reasons for this remained unclear.

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