

Sunscreen makes good economic sense

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Applying sunscreen on a regular basis not only prevents cancer, but will save the government money.

Researchers at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR) have found that providing sunscreen to people and encouraging daily usage not only prevents skin cancers but also saves considerable health care dollars.

“We’ve known for some time that frequent sunscreen use greatly reduces the number of skin cancers that develop,” said lead researcher Dr Louisa Gordon, from QIMR’s Cancer and Population Studies Laboratory.

“Our research shows that for as little as \$1 per person per year sunscreen has the potential to save [Medicare](#) an average of \$150 per person. This represents a saving of over \$126 million per year from the avoided cost of diagnosing and treating the skin cancers and [sunspots](#) that would otherwise occur amongst Queenslanders,” explained Dr Gordon.

“Compared to other [cancer prevention](#) initiatives sunscreen promotion and use is highly cost effective.”

The findings are the result of a community-based study involving 1,400 participants over five years. One portion of the group were given free sunscreen and daily use was promoted, while the other used sunscreen as they would normally, on an irregular basis. The participants were monitored for the development of skin cancer.

“Because of our large European-descent population and high UV climate, we have a substantial burden of skin cancer making it the most expensive cancer in Australia,” said Dr Gordon.

Sunscreen is the most practical sun protective measure for the face, neck and hands. These are the areas where most skin cancers develop and the hardest to cover up using hats or clothing.

“We have been conservative with the estimate of associated health care costs. Our numbers may well be an underestimate,” said Dr Gordon. “What we do know is that regular use of [sunscreen](#) protects the skin from our harsh climate and that it is also very cost-effective - not to mention the cosmetic benefit of regular sun screen use in preventing premature wrinkling and ageing.”

Dr Gordon and her team conducted this study in collaboration with Griffith University and The University of Queensland. The paper was published in the *Journal for Investigative Dermatology*.

Australia has the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Two of the most common types of skin cancer, squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) and basal cell carcinoma (BCC), together have more diagnoses than all other cancer cases combined. Queenslanders are at an even higher risk having the highest rate of melanoma in the world. Melanoma is the most aggressive form of [skin cancer](#) with almost 300 Queenslanders dying from the disease every year.

Provided by Queensland Institute of Medical Research

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