

Community Pharmacy Living Well Campaign

 Public Health
Agency

 Health and
Social Care

April 2026

'Care in the sun' skin cancer prevention campaign briefing

Care in the sun was established as part of the Department of Health's Skin Cancer Prevention Strategy and Action Plan (2011-2021). It aims to encourage people to adopt sun safe behaviours and to raise awareness about exposure to ultra violet (UV) radiation. The Care in the sun campaign will run during April and May 2026.

Campaign overview

Sunlight has many benefits, such as providing our bodies with vitamin D, supporting bone health, lowering blood pressure, helping to prevent disease and promote good mental health.

However, over exposure to UV radiation, from either the sun or sunbed use, can damage skin and the majority of skin cancers are caused by over exposure to UV radiation.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Northern Ireland accounting for over 31% of all cancers diagnosed. Over 4,000 people develop skin cancer each year and almost 1 in 10 of these are malignant melanoma, the most serious form. Malignant melanoma rates have risen over the past 40 years from an average of 103 cases per year in the mid-1980s www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/nicr/cancer-information/cancer-data-by-tumour-type/malignant-melanoma/

Key objectives from the Skin Cancer Prevention Strategy and Action Plan include increasing awareness of the risks associated with over exposure to UV radiation. The strategy is currently in an extension phase and informs a refreshed action plan for delivery in 2026-27.

An end review is planned during this time to inform future work. The strategy and action plan can be viewed at: www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/skin-cancer-prevention

Campaign aim

To encourage everyone to adopt sun safe behaviours and to raise awareness of the health impacts of over exposure to UV radiation.

Campaign target audience

The general population, including children and young people (50-75% of our total lifetime sun exposure occurs before the age of 18).

Over exposure to UV from the sun or a sunbed **can increase your risk of skin cancer**

Unhealthy glow means skin damage



www.careinthesun.org

#BeUVAware



8/20

Campaign messages

- A tan is a sign that your skin is damaged by UV radiation from the sun or sunbeds – it is not healthy.
- Over exposing yourself to UV radiation, increases your risk of sunburn, premature skin ageing and skin cancer.
- Do not use sunbeds - they are not a safe alternative to the sun.
- Sunbed use increases your risk of skin cancer, particularly if first use was before 35 years.
- Check when you are most at risk from UV radiation. Levels of UV radiation are highest in Northern Ireland between March and October. UV rays are strongest between 11.00am and 3.00pm.
- Check the UV index. This indicates how much solar UV radiation is reaching the earth's surface. When the UV index is 3 or more our skin and eyes need to be protected. If you are going outdoors, check what the UV index will be throughout the day. You can check this daily and hourly via an app on your mobile phone. You can download a weather app from the App Store (iPhone) or Google Play (android). Choose an app that has the UV index as a number not a symbol.
- Protect your skin and eyes when the UV index is 3 or more by following this guidance:
 - Stay in the shade between 11.00am and 3.00pm, when UV rays are strongest.
 - Cover up with suitable clothing.
 - Wear a broad brimmed hat and sunglasses with 100% UV protection. Buy sunglasses that have a CE mark or carry British Standard BS EN ISO 12312-1.
 - Use sunscreen on exposed skin; an SPF of at least 30 and UVA 4 stars and use the correct amount of sunscreen. Make sure you apply it thickly and evenly. An adult needs at least six teaspoons distributed evenly on the body for the correct level of protection with SPF of at least 30.
 - Babies under six months should stay out of direct sunlight. If exposure to sunlight is unavoidable, apply a small amount of high protection sunscreen to exposed areas, such as the cheeks and back of the hands. For children over six months choose SPF 30 or SPF 50 to protect against UVB rays and minimum UVA 4 stars. Higher SPF will give protection.
 - Don't allow your skin to go pink or red in the sun. Sunburn doesn't have to be raw, peeling or blistering skin; for people with darker skin, it might feel tender, irritated or itchy.
- Check your skin at least once a month. Be aware of any changes, and speak to your GP or pharmacist if you notice any mole changes, new moles or abnormal skin changes.
- **Ask your pharmacist for advice if you are taking any medication that affects your skin's sensitivity to sunlight, such as doxycycline.**



Choose and use sunscreen properly

When choosing and using sunscreen always check it gives protection from both UVA and UVB rays.

An adult needs at least six teaspoons of sunscreen for best protection, which means more than half a teaspoon of sunscreen to each arm, over half a teaspoon for the face and neck (including the ears), and just over one teaspoon for the front of your body, just over one teaspoon for the back of your body, and just over one teaspoon for each leg.

Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outdoors and then reapply sunscreen at least every two hours throughout the day, including 'once a day' and

'water resistant' products. Sunscreen can rub, sweat or wash off. It's especially important to reapply after towelling dry. Reapplying regularly helps avoid missing bits of skin.

Don't store sunscreens in very hot places, as extreme heat can cause deterioration of their protective ingredients.

Check the expiry date on your sunscreen before you use it. Look for a symbol on the pot with the letter M and a number which shows the number of months the sunscreen will last once it has been opened.

For more on applying sunscreen, go to:
www.careinthesun.org/sun-protection/sunscreen

It's never OK to use a sunbed

There is no safe limit for exposure to UV radiation from sunbeds.

Sunbeds can give out greater doses of UV rays than the midday tropical sun - using them is associated with an increased risk of skin damage including premature ageing and skin cancer.

Research shows that people who have used a sunbed at least once at any stage in their life have a 20% higher risk of developing melanoma skin cancer than people who have never used a sunbed.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer

(IARC), part of the World Health Organization, puts sunbeds in the highest cancer risk category.



Sunbed use can also harm eyesight. Without suitable eye protection, UV radiation from sunbeds can damage the user's eyes, risking eye inflammation, cataract formation, and, in some cases, eye cancer or ocular melanoma.

Using a sunbed will not prepare or protect skin before going on a sunshine holiday. Any use just increases cumulative damage and risk.

It is against the law for anyone under the age of 18 to use a sunbed on commercial premises.

Campaign materials

Copies of the following materials are enclosed:

2x A3 posters:

Over exposure to UV from the sun or a sunbed can increase your risk of skin cancer

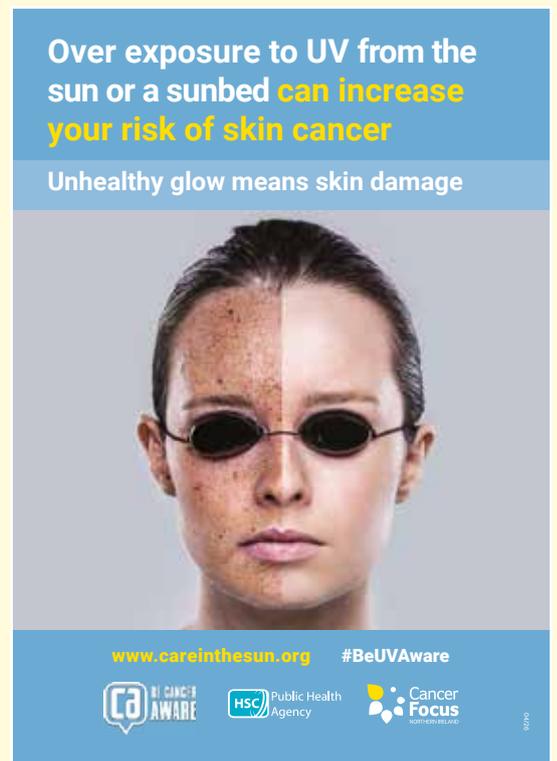


Take care in the sun



1 X A1 poster:

Over exposure to UV from the sun or a sunbed can increase your risk of skin cancer



1 x leaflet:

Skin cancer: what you need to know



A4 sticker sheets:

Stay safe in the sun



Pharmacies should display the posters and leaflets in the pharmacy within a designated health promotion display area. Posters can be rotated over the two-month period, but if space permits within the pharmacy all posters may be displayed at the same time. Pharmacies must show a poster in at least one window unit for the full duration of the campaign. The leaflet can be added to prescription bags or handed to a customer upon request.

Suggested campaign activities

The *Skin cancer what you need to know* campaign leaflet can be used as a conversation starter with patients and customers, handed out to those attending the pharmacy for prescriptions or purchasing SPF products. This would give them the opportunity to discuss what they have read with the pharmacy team.

Stickers have been provided for this campaign as a tool to engage with parents and their children. Pharmacy staff could either give to parents or guardians to pop on children when in the pharmacy or use on prescription bags being collected or delivered to the target audience.

Create a Care in the sun themed display if space allows using the campaign materials and things people can use to protect themselves from the sun, such as sun glasses, sun hats and a range of sun protection products that are at least SPF 30 and UVA 4 stars.

If you need inspiration, please click on the link <https://bso.hscni.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/cp-1-summary-lw-care-in-the-sun-280722.pdf> to view previous Care in the sun displays and read the evaluation summary from Care in the sun 2019 - the first Living Well campaign to run in community pharmacies.

The British Association of Dermatologists' Sun Awareness Week runs from 11-17 May this year. It is an opportunity to further highlight the dangers of UV exposure and promote skin cancer prevention, focusing on the importance of detecting skin cancer, dangers of sunbeds, and practising safe sun habits. For more, visit www.bad.org.uk/sun-awareness-week-2026

A resource is also available online to promote tips for parents, emphasising the need to protect children's skin, which is delicate and prone to UV damage. Parents seeking more information on ways to protect babies' and children's skin can be signposted to the *Bright idea* leaflet available here:

www.careinthesun.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CFNI-Bright-Idea-Leaflet-244.pdf

Contact community groups, local organisations and businesses to promote the campaign messages. There are many helpful resources and ideas at www.careinthesun.org

Link with local schools to let them know the campaign is running. Some may welcome a member of the pharmacy team coming out to talk about the importance of sun safety, particularly with school sports days that may be running at the same time as the campaign.

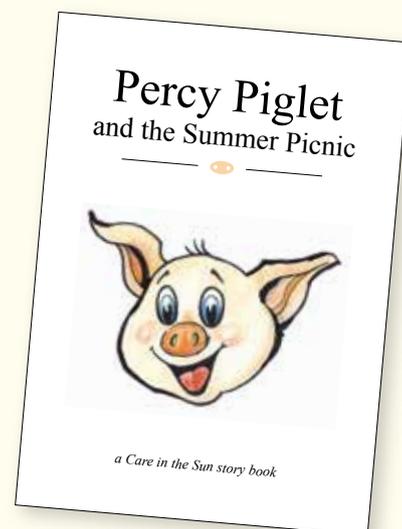
Pharmacies could link with local sports and running clubs to provide advice on protecting skin from UV damage when participating in sport.

If there is a playgroup in the area, the Care in the sun storybook *Percy Piglet and the Summer Picnic* could be read to the children. Download it from this link:

www.careinthesun.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/schools_percey_pig_summer_picnic.pdf

A cuddly toy dressed with sunglasses, sunhat, SPF 50 and water bottle could be used as a visual reminder of the story's messages.

If parents or guardians are buying sunglasses for themselves, ask them to consider eye protection for their children too. Children's sunglasses should provide UV protection and have a recognised safety standard mark.



Social media

For pharmacies using social media channels, there is an opportunity to let followers know the pharmacy is involved in the campaign and to promote the campaign messages.

Please tag the Public Health Agency, Health and Social Care NI, Community Pharmacy NI and NICPLD in your posts and follow our social media accounts. Include the hashtags #LivingWell, #CareInTheSun and #BeUVAware on social media posts for this campaign.



X:

@publichealthni

@HSC_NI

@compharmacyni

@NICPLD1



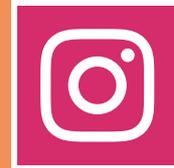
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All Living Well materials to support this campaign are here: <https://bso.hscni.net/living-well>

Training and professional development

- NICPLD has a recorded lecture 'Skin cancer prevention and early diagnosis training' available at <https://www.nicpld.org/url/recordedlectures> which staff may wish to view.

- 'Be UV Aware' is a free course run by Cancer Focus and is available for the whole pharmacy team. To access this course visit <https://training.cancerfocusni.org/login/index.php> and set up an account. Once your account is created, go to All Courses > Cancer Prevention > Be UV Aware. You can self enrol and complete the course.



Signposting for further information and support

Customers and patients wishing to learn more can find a wealth of information at: www.careinthesun.org

Information on the risks associated with sunbed use can be found at: www.careinthesun.org/sunbeds

Questions and answers

Q: When do I need sun protection?

A: When the UV index is 3 or more you need to protect yourself from sun damage. In Northern Ireland the UV index reaches 3 or above between March and October and it can reach 7 or 8 in mid-summer. Find out more at www.careinthesun.org/skin-cancer/be-uv-aware-uv-index

Q: On a cloudy day am I safe from sun damage?

A: Up to 80% of the solar UV rays can penetrate light cloud cover. UV rays from the sun can damage your skin through cloud, windows and even when it doesn't feel warm outside. The UV index is a more accurate way of assessing your risk of sun damage than relying only on weather conditions such as cloud cover or air temperature.

Q: How do I check my skin?

A: You should check the skin all over your body regularly (ideally once a month):

- Use mirrors or ask a friend to look at your back, the backs of your legs and all the areas you can't easily see yourself.
- Don't forget the soles of your feet, between your toes, your scalp, neck and nails.
- Look for anything that is inflamed, growing, bleeding, crusting, red around the edges, particularly itchy or painful, or changing in any way.
Seek the advice of your GP if you notice any mole changes, new moles or abnormal skin changes.

Q: Does skin cancer only affect people with fair skin that burns easily?

A: Skin cancer can affect anyone, regardless of skin colour. However, fairer skin types are more at risk from the effects of over exposure to UV radiation and all its consequences.

Q: Can a 'base tan' help to protect my skin from sun damage?

A: A tan is a sign that the skin has been damaged from over exposure to UV radiation. There is no safe or healthy way to get a tan from UV rays. Getting a tan provides little protection against later exposure to sunlight and the resulting skin damage outweighs any later protective effect.

Q: I use make up with SPF included. Do I still need sunscreen?

A: Yes. Sunscreen is essential regardless of whether or not your makeup has SPF. Adults need more than half a teaspoon for their face/neck before applying makeup. Throughout the day this can wear off and you should reapply every two hours.

For more information on being UV aware and sun safety, go to www.careinthesun.org



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