

## Working outdoors

### Why do outdoor workers need sun protection?

Workers in the UK spend different amounts of time outdoors. If you work indoors then you still need to think about sun protection during your lunch break over the summer months.

If you work outdoors, your skin is regularly exposed to the damaging effects of the sun over a long period of time, so it's important to take steps to protect yourself.

### Who is most at risk?

Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun is the main cause of skin cancer. Anyone can develop skin cancer, but some people are more likely to get the disease than others. These people tend to have one or more of the following and should therefore be more vigilant in the sun:

- Fair skin that burns easily in strong sun
- Lots of moles or freckles
- Red or fair hair
- Light coloured eyes
- A personal or family history of skin cancer
- A history of sunburn

If you have naturally brown or black skin you are much less likely to develop skin cancer. This is because people with naturally brown or black skin have more melanin pigment in their skin, which helps protect the skin from damaging UV rays. However, skin cancer can still affect people with brown or black skin. It is most common on parts of the body that aren't often exposed to the sun such as the soles of the feet.

### Tips for protecting yourself

#### Seek shade

Spend time in the shade between 11am and 3pm where possible. You can find and create shade in many different ways:

- Wearing a wide-brimmed hat
- Trees and foliage
- Canopies and awnings
- Umbrellas and parasols
- Tents and shelters

Cloud and ground conditions will also have an impact:

- Heavy cloud cover does offer protection but you will still burn on a day when there is thin or scattered clouds
- Reflection – up to 85% of UV rays can be reflected back from snow, sand, cement and water

Spend your breaks in the shade!

#### Cover up

When there's no shade around the best way to protect your skin from the sun is to cover up with loose clothing, a wide-brimmed hat and good quality sunglasses. Choose a protective hat – a wide brimmed hat – that shades your face, neck ears and head. Avoid caps as they only provide protection for your nose and forehead. Talk to your employer about including a hat in your uniform/work wear.

Wear sunglasses where possible to protect your eyes. Too much UV exposure could also cause cataracts and cancers of the eye. These are the standards you should ask for in a good quality pair of sunglasses:

- 'CE Mark' & British Standard (BS EN 1836:1997)
- UV 400 label
- Statement – offers 100% UV protection

A wraparound style is recommended for full protection. And take great care to make sure they fit properly – poorly fitting glasses offer poor protection as sunlight can reflect off the back face of your sunglasses' lenses back into the eye.

### **Use a sunscreen**

Apply at least SPF 15 sunscreen before you start work then reapply regularly and generously. The ideal is to:

- Apply 15-30 minutes before going out in the sun and reapply ASAP after going out!
- Reapply every 2 hours (or sooner) – beware of sunscreens offering all day protection with one application
- Use generous amounts of sunscreen at every application
- Always apply to clean dry skin

If you are doing strenuous activity use a sunscreen for sports or with a low oil content.

**If you do get sunburnt...**tell your employer and discuss what improvements could be made.