

Many Americans wrong about Sun's skin cancer dangers: Poll

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(HealthDay)—You might think everybody knows how to protect themselves from the sun's harmful rays, but a new survey reveals that one-third of Americans lack a basic understanding of sun safety and skin cancer.

That's the surprising takeaway from an American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) survey of 1,000 U.S. adults.

Fifty-three percent of respondents didn't realize shade offers protection from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays, and 47% incorrectly said a base tan would prevent sunburns or were unsure.

Thirty-five percent said [tanning](#) is safe as long as you don't burn or were unsure, and 31% were unaware that tanning causes [skin cancer](#).

"These findings surprised us and demonstrate that misperceptions about skin [cancer](#) and sun exposure are still prevalent," said AAD president Dr. Kenneth Tomecki, a board-certified

dermatologist.

"As dermatologists who see firsthand the impact that skin cancer, including melanoma—the deadliest form of skin cancer—has on our patients and their families, it's concerning to see that so many individuals still do not understand how to protect themselves from ultraviolet exposure," Tomecki said in an AAD news release.

The survey revealed that people born after 1996 (Generation Z) had the greatest misunderstandings about sun exposure, followed closely by those who were born between 1981 and 1996 (millennials).

"These are striking results when it comes to younger generations' knowledge about basic sun exposure," Tomecki said. "Gen Z and millennials have a lifetime of potential damaging [sun exposure](#) ahead of them, so now is the time to close the knowledge gap and ensure they are aware of how easy it is to practice sun-safe behavior."

Of Gen Z respondents, 42% were unaware that tanning causes skin cancer; 41% didn't know that UV rays are reflected by snow, water and sand; and 33% didn't realize they could get sunburned on a cloudy day.

Among millennials, 42% were unaware the sun's UV rays can penetrate clothing; 37% didn't know that tanning causes skin cancer; and 23% were unaware that sunburn increases skin cancer risk.

The academy offered tips for staying safe year-round.

These include seeking shade, especially when the sun's rays are strongest (between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.), and wearing sun-protective clothing, including a lightweight, long-sleeved shirt, pants, wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses with UV protection.

Clothing with an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) on the label is more effective, according to the academy. It also recommended using a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or more on all skin not covered by clothing. Sunscreen should be reapplied every two hours or more often if swimming or sweating.

"Since unprotected UV exposure is the most significant risk factor for skin cancer, it's critical to protect yourself from UV light, both from the sun and indoor tanning devices," Tomecki said.

"Contrary to what many people think, tanning—indoors and out— isn't safe and can lead to skin cancer, as well as premature [skin](#) aging, like wrinkles and age spots."

More information: The American Academy of Dermatology Association has an online quiz to [test your knowledge about sun safety](#).

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