



NEW FIGURES SHOW SUN SMART MESSAGE STARTING TO GET THROUGH

Thursday 4 February, 2010

Premier Kristina Keneally officially marked **World Cancer Day** today by releasing an encouraging new study into teenage attitudes towards tanning and sun smart behaviour.

Based on a survey of more than 7,500 children aged 12-17, the *NSW School Students Health Behaviours Survey* showed that 35 per cent of school students in 2008 preferred to have no tan at all, up from 25 per cent just four years earlier.

It also showed a reduction from 79 per cent to 75 per cent in high school students who were sunburnt at least once the previous summer.

Ms Keneally and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer), Frank Sartor said education campaigns such as the Government's \$5 million *Dark Side of Tanning* melanoma campaign - now in its third year - were contributing to a change in behaviour.

"Attitudes of teenagers towards getting burnt and having a tan are thankfully starting to change, but we need to be vigilant," Ms Keneally said.

"Almost 500 people in NSW died from melanoma cancer last year and Australians have the highest incidence rate of this cancer in the world.

"The encouraging trend from this survey is that as awareness of the dangers associated with sun tanning grow, young people are becoming more sun smart and less likely to desire a tan.

"However the figures also tell us we need to keep working with all school children, particularly teenage girls, to make sure the message is getting across."

NSW Cancer Institute data shows:

- Australia has the highest rate of melanoma in the world.
- One third of all cancer cases in 15 to 30 year olds in NSW were melanoma.
- Melanoma is the fourth most common cancer in NSW, and the number one cancer amongst men aged 25 to 54 and women aged 15 to 29.
- There will be an estimated 4,200 new cases of melanoma each year by 2011, compared with 3,900 cases in 2009.

Mr Sartor said that while fewer students were burnt last summer than ten years ago, 3 in 4 students still were spending too much time in the sun.

"The High School survey shows increases in the number of students seeking shade, wearing protective clothing, using sunglasses and sunscreen over the past six years," Mr Sartor said.

"However there has been continued declines in those who are wearing hats or staying indoors during peak UV periods.

“I am urging young people to put their health first and fashion second when it comes to covering up in the sun,” he said.

The *Dark Side of Tanning* - <http://www.darksideoftanning.com.au/> - ads are part of an ongoing awareness campaign targeting the most vulnerable.

Current NSW cancer education programs for children include:

- Teaching and learning about sun protection in New South Wales government schools occurs as part of the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education key learning area which all students study from Kindergarten to Year 10.
- Primary schools can choose to implement the Anti Cancer Council *SunSmart* program in response to community needs as a part of their individual school practices and procedures for sun protection
- The Department of Education encourages schools to take sun safety seriously and to implement a range of strategies and provisions to increase awareness about sun protection and to encourage sun protective behaviours.
- The Department of Education promotes a whole of school approach to sun safety in schools through the *Protection from the Sun. Guidelines to assist in implementing the Student Welfare Policy.*
- Schools also reinforce messages about sun protection in sports lessons, outdoor excursions and at whole of school events such as swimming and athletics carnivals.
- Positive role modeling of good sun protection behaviours by all members of the school community can help to encourage students to take responsibility for their own sun protection.
- The provision of shade in NSW government schools has been included in the facility standards for a number of years. Examples are the Covered Outdoor Learning Area (COLA), outdoor learning spaces and the inclusion of seating in shaded areas of the school such as along verandah

The NSW Cancer Institute’s Cancer Prevention Program Manager, Anita Dessaix, said Australia’s outdoor lifestyle is a significant risk factor for melanoma.

“It is especially important that children and teenagers protect their skin, because they tend to spend more time outdoors than adults,” Ms Dessaix said.

“Sun exposure damages your skin which accumulates over a lifetime and can lead to skin cancer.

“Because this damage adds up, it’s important to protect your skin whatever your age.

“Teenagers and adults should protect their skin by seeking shade during peak UV periods and wearing a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen.”

Background notes

- There were 3528 cases of melanoma in NSW in 2007, and an estimated 3968 in 2009.
- There were 482 deaths from melanoma in NSW in 2007, and an estimated 478 in 2009
- One in 13 males and one in 25 females will develop melanoma by age 85.

NSW School Students Health Behaviours Survey:

- NSW Health conducts the *NSW School Students Health Behaviours Survey* every three years as part of the Australian School Students Alcohol and Drugs survey.
- The survey collects information about the health behaviours and attitudes of secondary school students. The survey showed:
 - A reduction in the number of students who were burnt at least once last summer from 79 per cent in 1999 to 75.3 per cent in 2008. Amongst males, the decline is more prominent, with a reduction from 78.2 per cent in 1999 to 72.4 per cent in 2008;
 - A decline in the proportion of students who believe that you only get cancer if you get burnt often (from 29.7 per cent in 2005 to 25.4 per cent in 2008);
 - An increase in the proportion of students seeking shade between 2005 (26.1%) and 2008 (28.8%);
 - The proportion of students who used a solarium at least once in the last 12 months decreased significantly between 2005 (12.4%) and 2008 (7.2%); and
 - An increase in the proportion of students who prefer no sun tan (from 25.4 per cent in 2005 to 35 per cent in 2008). This change is more prominent amongst males, with an increase from 30.5 per cent in 2005 to 42.2 per cent in 2008.
 - A decline in the proportion of students who usually or always wear a hat when outside from 50.6 per cent in 1996 to 24.7 per cent in 2008.

NSW secondary school students who prefer no suntan

