

MEDIA RELEASE

As summer starts drawing to an end, Aussies should still reach for their shades

Tuesday 11 February, 2020: As the nation swelters through another hotter than average summer¹, [Optometry Australia](http://www.optometryaustralia.com.au) is urging Aussies to stop turning a blind eye to the damaging effects of the harsh Australian sun.

A new report from Optometry Australia, the *2020 Vision Index*, revealed that although 76 per cent of Australians stated their vision was their most important sense, only 58 per cent own a pair of UV protected sunglasses - leaving 42 per cent of the nation's eyes vulnerable to sun damage.

Though most Australians are likely to be familiar with the *SunSmart* mantra 'Slip-Slop-Slap', the Cancer Council of Australia has now added "seek" (shade) and "slide" to their popular mantra to encourage people to slide on a pair of sunglasses.

Optometry Australia welcomes this addition but is alarmed that almost one in 10 Australians do not know UV protective sunglasses exist, whilst 30 per cent believe they are unnecessary.

With 2020 being the year of good vision for life, Optometry Australia stresses the importance of Aussies properly protecting their eyes against ultraviolet (UV) light.

Exposure to direct UV light from the sun and reflective light can wreak havoc on eyes, potentially leading to conditions such as cataracts, pterygium, photokeratitis and macular degeneration.

Despite the risks, only 31 per cent of those aged 18 to 34 stated UV protection in their sunnies as a first priority; compared to 53 per cent of Australians aged 55 years or older.

Expense is the most common reason given by Australians for not owning UV protective sunglasses, with 35 per cent of the nation not owning a pair because they think they are too expensive. On average, Australians are willing to spend \$179 on sunglasses.

Amongst younger demographics style outplays sensibility, with 18 per cent of 18 to 34-year olds saying they do not own UV protective sunglasses because they can't find a pair that suits them.

Optometry Australia's Chief Clinical Optometrist Luke Arundel said, "In Australia, we are exposed to some of the highest levels of UV in the world and our eyes are at risk of developing serious issues when left unprotected."

While UV radiation can still cause damage year-round and even on cold and cloudy days, Mr Arundel says UV levels are intensified in summer and that UV protection is needed when the UV index is above 3².

¹ Bureau of Meteorology, <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ahead/outlooks/>, accessed 2019

² Cancer Council Australia, https://wiki.cancer.org.au/skincancerstats/UV_radiation, accessed 2019



“Not wearing sunnies is just as bad as heading out without a hat and sunscreen in the middle of summer. When there are options available which are both protective and fashionable, there is no excuse for taking the risk.”

Optometry Australia is urging Australians of all ages to protect their eyes year-round when outdoors and not just over the 10am to 2pm peak UV skin exposure period.

“Our brow protects us from some of the UV rays entering the eye when the sun is directly above us. This is why it’s also important to be wearing UV protective eyewear during mid-morning and mid-afternoon, along with the winter months when the sun is lower on the horizon,” said Mr Arundel.

“With a great range of UV protective sunglasses widely available, there is really no excuse for not wearing sunglasses outdoors.”

Other insights emerging from the *2020 Vision Index* include:

- 50 per cent of Australians always wear UV protected sunnies during summer, compared to only 27 per cent in winter.
- A large majority of Australians (76 per cent) do not believe it is necessary to wear sunglasses during winter.
- 72 per cent of Australian’s do not know what level of protection their sunglasses have; whilst only six per cent own sunglasses with the highest category standard.

Last year, sunglasses standards came into effect which requires sunnies to be classified by five categories, ranging from ‘fashion spectacles’ with no UV protection through to protective sunglasses, which highlights that not all sunglasses are made equal.

“When looking for a new pair of sunglasses, make sure you look at the swing tag category number. A category three or four lens will not only reduce glare but will also protect you against the Australian sun’s harsh UV rays – which is what sunglasses are intended to do,” said Mr Arundel.

“Close fitting wrap around sunnies or styles with wide temples (arms) provide the best protection for light entering from the side of the face. And of course, prescription sunglass options also exist for those who need to wear glasses to see clearly.”

According to Cancer Council Australia, UV levels in Australia during the summer months can average between 12-14 and can reach 16-17 in northern states. UV values above 11 are considered extreme³ and Australians should remain shaded and protected during peak months.

For further information on how to protect your eyes this summer visit an optometrist or head to www.goodvisionforlife.com.au.

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³ Cancer Council Australia, https://wiki.cancer.org.au/skincancerstats/UV_radiation, accessed 2019



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Optometry Australia is the peak professional body for optometrists. Representing eight out of every 10 Australian-based optometrists, Optometry Australia's focus is to lead and advance the profession of optometry by putting eye-health front and centre of Australian health care.