

17 Sun protection

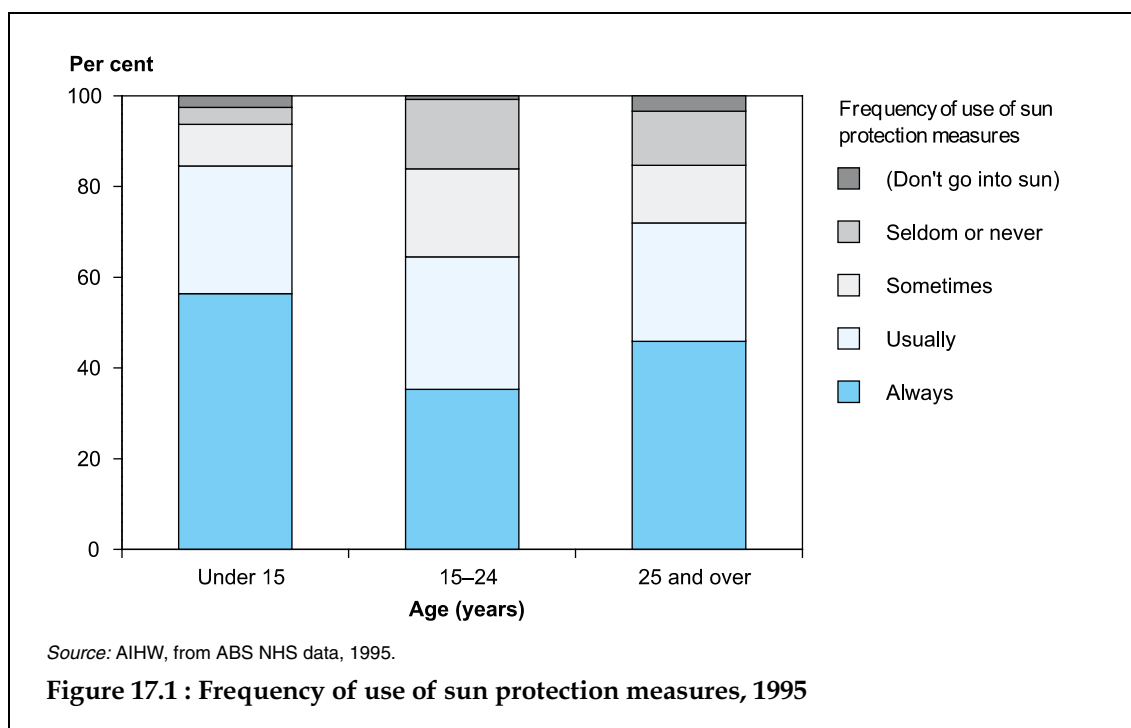
Australia has the highest incidence of melanoma in the world. Melanoma and non-melanocytic skin cancers also constitute the most common form of cancer within Australia and cause significant mortality and morbidity. Early detection of cancerous lesions and their treatment help reduce both mortality and morbidity (NCCI 1997; AIHW 1998).

Exposure to ultra-violet radiation is a primary risk factor for melanoma and other skin cancers (NHMRC 1996). To reduce the risk, over-exposure to sunlight should be minimised. Hats, sunscreen, clothing and other protective measures are also helpful. The 1995 ABS National Health Survey collected information on exposure to sunlight, use of sun protection measures and examination of freckles or moles by respondents or their doctors. This section compares data on youth aged 15–24 years with children (under 15) and adults (aged 24 years and over).

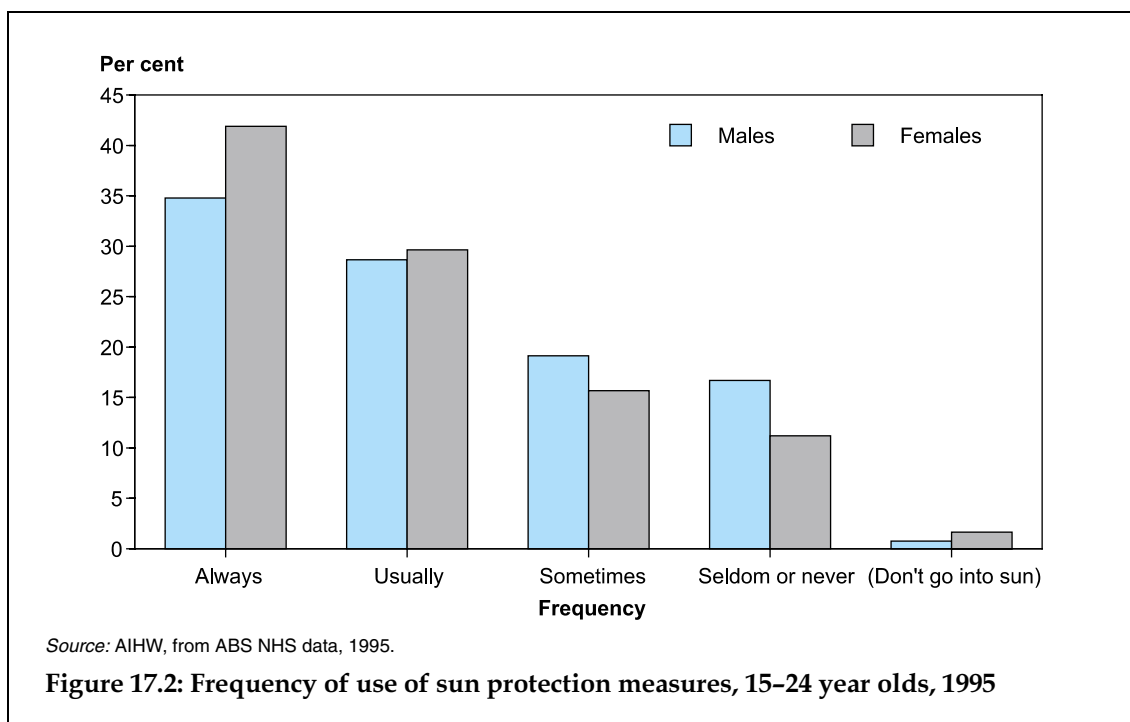
Sun protection

Frequency of use

This section presents information on the frequency of use of sun protection measures. Respondents were asked whether they had taken measures to protect themselves from the sun in the past month.



- Australian youth aged 15–24 years used sun protection measures less frequently than both children (based on caregiver’s reports) and adults. Approximately 15% of youth seldom or never used sun protection measures, representing a higher proportion than children and adults.
- Only 35% of youth always used sun protection measures, a lower proportion than both children and adults.
- Although the proportions who usually used sun protection measures were similar for the three age groups, a greater proportion of youth only used sun protection measures sometimes.



- Young females were more likely than young males to always use sun protection measures.
- A higher proportion of young males seldom or never used sun protection measures, compared with young females.
- For both males and females, those aged 18–19 years were more likely than 15–17 year olds and 20–24 year olds to seldom or never use sun protection measures, and less likely to always use sun protection (data not shown).

Type of protection

The previous section showed that Australian youth used sun protection measures less frequently than children aged under 15 years and adults. This section examines the types of protection used.

Table 17.1: Type of sun protection used^(a), 1995

Age (years)	Hat	Sunscreen	Clothing	Avoid sun	Umbrella	Other
Under 15	79.5	63.5	49.3	24.7	4.5	0.8
15–24	47.5	46.1	42.1	20.9	2.1	0.4
25 and over	54.7	38.3	30.7	23.4	5.3	0.5

(a) For persons who were reported to have used at least one of these sun protection measures. Persons may be recorded as using more than one type of protection.

Source: AIHW, from ABS NHS data, 1995.

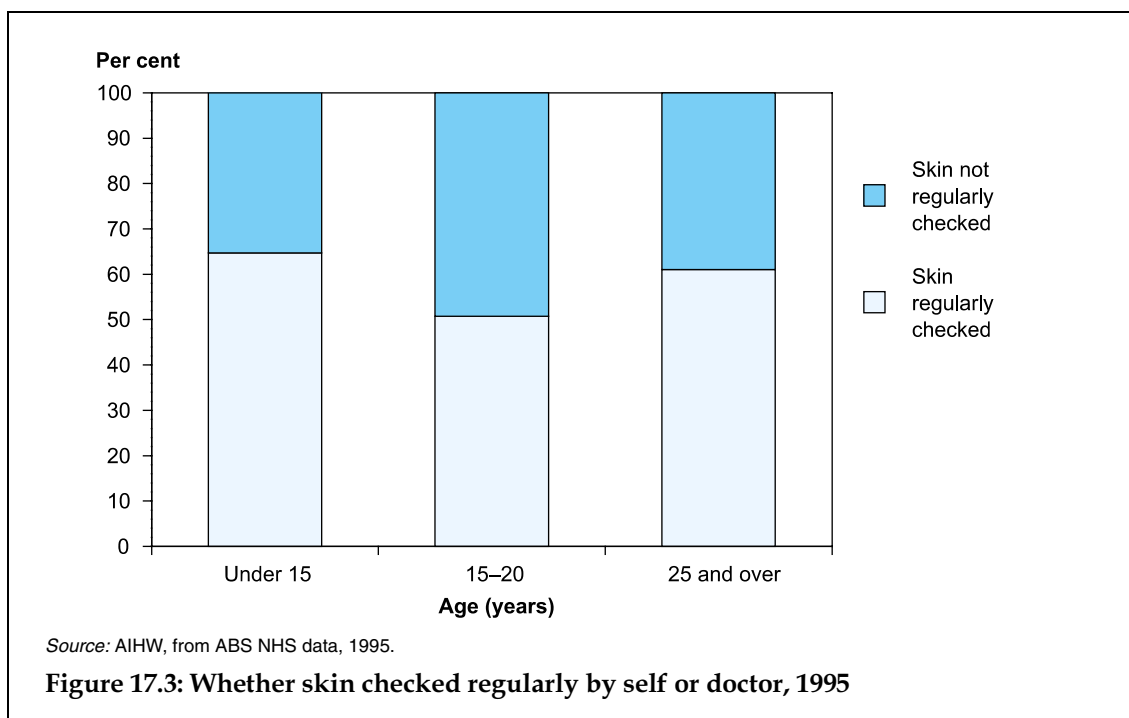
- For each of the age groups, the types of sun protection measures used were ranked in the same order. Hats followed by sunscreen, and clothing were the most frequently used types of protection.
- Young people aged 15–24 years used a hat, an umbrella or avoided the sun less commonly than children and adults.

Sun protection

- The use of sunscreen and clothing as sun protection measures decreased with age.

Skin examination

This section presents information on the proportions of youth reporting that they regularly checked their skin (for changes in freckles and moles) or had it checked by a doctor. Comparison is made with children and adults.



- In addition to using sun protection measures less frequently than children and adults, Australian youth were also less likely to regularly check their skin themselves or have it checked by a doctor.

References

- National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 1996. Primary prevention of skin cancer in Australia: report of the sun protection programs working party. Canberra: NHMRC.
- National Cancer Control Initiative (NCCI) 1997. Cancer control towards 2002 – the first stage of a nationally coordinated plan for cancer control. Canberra: DHFS.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 1998. Health in rural and remote Australia. AIHW Cat. No. PHE 6. Canberra: AIHW.