

# Skin cancer prevention

While most skin cancers are not malignant the most severe form, malignant melanoma, can be a potentially life threatening condition, particularly if not diagnosed in the early stages.

Last reviewed  
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In Northern Ireland in 2021, a total of 45 people were diagnosed with malignant (cancerous) melanoma. In the same year, 3,392 people were diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer. Like most cancers it is more common in older people. But melanoma is more common in younger people in their teens and 20s than some other cancers. The earlier a cancer is picked up, the easier it is to treat it and the more likely the treatment is to be successful.

In July of 2011 the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety published a new ten-year strategy ([Skin Cancer Prevention Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2020](#)) building on the previous one released in 1997 and taken forward by the Northern Ireland Melanoma Strategy Implementation Group (NIMSIG).

The Public Health Agency (PHA) was asked by the Department to lead on the implementation of the current strategy and to establish a multi-disciplinary steering group to take forward the strategy's six objectives. The strategy and action plan focuses on the prevention and early detection of skin cancers, and while it has been developed to take account of the population as a whole, it pays particular attention to children and young people, and those who spend significant periods of time outdoors through work or leisure.

## The six objectives of the strategy are to:

- Increase public awareness regarding the dangers of overexposure to UV radiation from sunlight and artificial tanning devices;
- Reduce the overall use of artificial tanning devices;

- Increase individual and organisation-wide practice of sun safety behaviours;
- Increase awareness about the early signs of skin cancer and the need for prompt attention;
- Encourage earlier detection and treatment of malignant melanomas;
- Promote further research into knowledge, attitudes and behaviour and the epidemiology of skin cancer.

## **For further information on skin cancer prevention see:**

- [Skin cancer \(melanoma and non-melanoma\) | Be Cancer Aware](#)
- Care in the sun - <http://www.careinthesun.org/>
- Cancer Focus Northern Ireland - <http://cancerfocusni.org/>
- [PHA and UCF welcome new law on sunbed use \(2012\) | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Sunbeds: look a little deeper | HSC Public Health Agency](#)

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## **Campaigns and publications 2026:**

- [Living Well: 'Care in the sun' campaign 2026 | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Early detection saves lives: Be UV aware, protect your skin and check for changes | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Pharmacy campaign urges people to 'Be UV aware' | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Skin cancer: What you need to know | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Stay safe in the sun on your winter holiday | HSC Public Health Agency](#)