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Canadians' Skin Cancer Concerns Sees Significant Shift

Just over half (53%) of Canadians think the increasing risk of skin cancer is a concern of sun exposure and only four in ten (40%) consider it their greatest concern, which are both all-time lows.

Toronto, ON, May 7, 2024 – The Canadian Dermatology Association's annual Sun Awareness survey show significant changes in Canadians' attitudes towards sun exposure and the environmental impact of sunscreen over the past year. This wave of the study showcases a shift in understanding, misinformation, and behavioral practices related to sun exposure and sunscreen usage.

Firstly, the concern about the increased risk of skin cancer has significantly declined by 9 points, reaching a new all-time low of 54%, while just four in ten (40%, -10 pts) consider it their greatest concern. This is a striking shift in Canadians' attitude towards skin cancer. However, those aged 55+ (63%) continue to be the most concerned about the risk of skin cancer. Meanwhile, women are still more concerned than men about sun exposure increasing the risk of skin cancer (59%) though the gap between men and women narrowed this wave.

Important attitudes and behaviors regarding sun and sun protection also shifted significantly. Most Canadians continue to believe too much sun ages your skin (90%, -3 pts), damages your eyes (86%, -5 pts) and causes irreparable damage to your skin (81%, -4 pts), but the proportion who agree with each statement declined significantly this wave. Combined with these changes in attitudes there are also some worrying changes in sun protection behaviours this wave. Fewer Canadians report wearing sunglasses with UV protective lenses when outdoors year-round (66%, -6 pts) and apply sunscreen when going outdoors (65%, -5 pts) at least occasionally. All the while more Canadians say they are partaking in indoor tanning compared to last wave (15% vs. 11% last wave).

Secondly, the research highlights an unfortunate increase in the agreement with misinformation about sun exposure. More Canadians now believe that the dangers of sun exposure are exaggerated (32%, +8 pts), there is no need to use sunscreen when it's cloudy (32%, +7 pts), sun protection in the winter is unnecessary (28%, +4 pts), and that getting a sunburn is the first step to a suntan (23%, +5 pts). These figures represent a reversal of the decline in agreement with misinformation seen in 2019.

Thirdly, Canadians continue to be confused by UVA and UVB rays as only about a quarter can correctly identify the difference between UVA (27%) and UVB (24%) rays with significantly fewer being able to correctly identify UVB rays this wave (24% vs. 29% last wave). While the amount who misidentify one for the other dropped to about a third (UVA: 35% vs. 43% last wave and UVB: 33% vs. 43% last wave), the proportion who say they don't know increased significantly to four in ten (UVA: 41% vs. 28% last wave and UVB: 40% vs. 28% last wave).



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On a positive note, the study shows a significant increase in the use of sunscreen, both daily and all year round. Nearly three in ten Canadians now report using sunscreen all year round (28%, +7 pts), and two in ten use it daily (19%, +4 pts), both significant increases from 2019 and all-time highs.

The research also reveals a decrease in the number of Canadians who think that sunscreen may cause environmental damage, with the figure standing at 52%, -8 pts. This shows that Canadians' concerns about the environmental impact of sunscreen have been partially alleviated.

The research also revealed that the most popular sources of information about sunscreen for Canadians are their pharmacy or pharmacist (32%) and a general online search (30%). Only about one in ten (16%) Canadians say they typically go to the Canadian Dermatology Association website to get information about sunscreen.

This research provides a valuable snapshot of the changing attitudes and behaviors towards sun exposure and the use of sunscreen. It highlights the need for continuous education and awareness campaigns to dispel misinformation and promote safe sun practices.

About the Study

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted between November 10 and 14, 2023, on behalf of the Canadian Dermatology Association. For this survey, a sample of 1,051 respondents aged 16+ in Canada was collected. Quotas and weighting were employed to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the Canadian population according to census parameters. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll is accurate to within ± 3.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all Canadians aged 16+ been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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