

Sun exposure at work could lead to one skin cancer death a week

Working in the sun could lead to one death and around five new cases of [melanoma skin cancer](#) a week, according to research published in the [British Journal of Cancer](#).



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Construction workers had the highest number of deaths (44% of deaths), followed by agriculture workers (23% of deaths).

Public administration and defence workers - including the police and the armed forces - accounted for 10% of deaths.

The researchers, based at [Imperial College London](#), estimated that there are 48 deaths and 241 cases of melanoma skin cancer each year in Britain caused by ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun at work.

Dr Lesley Rushton, lead researcher from Imperial College London, said: "We've shown previously that people often don't understand the risks of damage caused by sun in the UK. But this research shows you don't have to work in the Mediterranean or a traditionally sunny country for the sun to damage your skin.

"It's important to get to know what your skin is normally like, and to tell your doctor if you notice any changes to how your

skin looks or feels. Skin cancer can appear as a new mole or mark, or it can be a change to something you've had for a while.

"Now that we have a clearer picture of the extent of the damage caused, employers need to make sure they take sun exposure at work seriously and work out how to reduce it."

Sarah Williams, Cancer Research UK's health information manager, said: "These figures reveal the risk that some people might face from too much sun exposure whilst working. But we need further research to conclude whether sun exposure at work is directly responsible for these skin cancers. The researchers looked at the risk of developing skin cancer for outdoor workers using information from international studies, and the proportion of workers potentially exposed to sun from British data sources. These figures were then used to estimate the number of people who might have developed skin cancer due to work related exposure using a mathematical model.

"We all need some sun for healthy bones, but too much can increase the risk of skin cancer, and the risk can be higher for some people. Generally, the best ways for people to protect their skin is to spend time in the shade between 11am and 3pm, and cover up with clothing. Also use sunscreen with at least SPF 15 and four or more stars on the parts of the body you can't cover, like face and hands."

Graham Parker, President of the [Institution of Occupational Safety and Health](#), said: "This important research was commissioned by IOSH for the Solar phase of our No Time to Lose campaign, which aims to raise awareness of cancer caused by work. We're delighted to see it published in the British Journal of Cancer. The campaign encourages businesses to do what they can to reduce risks. One way to do this is to develop 'sun safety strategies'.

"We worked with forward-thinking companies, such as the Royal Mail Group, which signed up to our pledge to help prevent occupational cancer. Royal Mail put in place a sun safety strategy which includes providing wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved tops and trousers as part of its uniform. It encourages its workers to cover up during the higher UV months. Using high-factor sunscreen is helpful but should not be relied on as the only barrier to the harmful rays."

The study was funded by the [Institution of Occupational Safety and Health](#).

Source: [Cancer Research UK](#)

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