

Many Sunscreens Don't Meet Their Label Claims

A New Zealand investigation into sunscreen manufacturers has seen six out of 10 sunscreens fail to meet the SPF claims made on the label.

Consumer NZ tested 10 sunscreens against two aspects of the voluntary Australian and New Zealand standard for sunscreens: First was a sunscreen's SPF (sun protection factor), which measures protection against UVB rays, and second was its broad-spectrum protection (against UVA and UVB rays).

Only three of the 10 sunscreens met their SPF label claim and the requirements for broad-spectrum protection. Five products claimed to be either SPF50 or 50+, and produced results of between 16 and 42.

However, the worst performing product by far was Coola Classic Body Sunscreen Plumeria SPF30 – which only produced an SPF of 6.

The watchdog says a key reason for the variations was a lack of consistency between batches.

“Companies don't have to regularly test their products to ensure they still meet SPF claims even if the ingredient supply changes. This is especially an issue for sunscreens containing titanium dioxide or zinc oxide.”

The sunscreen standard is mandatory in Australia, but voluntary in New Zealand where sunscreens are classified as cosmetics. Consumer NZ said they had been “campaigning for a mandatory sunscreen standard for many years.”

“In a country with one of the highest rates of skin cancer and melanoma in the world, it's not good enough sunscreens aren't regulated.”

“Companies should be testing each new formulation of a product, especially if it contains different active ingredients. They should also regularly test their products to ensure different batches still meet their label claims.”

Skin Cancer College president Dr Keith Monnington said voluntary compliance with the standard was simply not satisfactory for a country with high skin cancer rates.

“Consumers need to have confidence in SPF claims made by sunscreen manufacturers.”

Sunscreens that met their claims: Nivea Sun Kids Protect & Sensitive Sun Lotion SPF50+ UV Guard Max Sunscreen SPF50+ Essone Natural Sunscreen Summer Coconut & Jojoba SPF30 Smart365 Sun Sunscreen Lotion Kids SPF50+ Sunscreens that didn't: Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Face & Body Dry-Touch Sunscreen Lotion SPF50 Bondi Sands Coconut Beach Sunscreen Lotion SPF50+ Banana Boat SunComfort SPF50+ Sensense Sensitive Invisible SPF50 Coola Classic Body Plumeria SPF30 This is certainly not the first study to find sunscreens were falling short of the label claims. Last years Consumer NZ investigation found only nine (out of 20) sunscreens met their SPF label claim and requirements for broad spectrum. And earlier this year, a US consumer organisation found 24 (out of 73) lotions, sprays, sticks and lip balms tested at less than half their labelled SPF. The Skin & Cancer Foundation of Australia recently urged employers to wake up on sun safety, after a study found an 'unacceptable' number of organisations were failing to meet their responsibilities in protecting workers from sun exposure (see related article).

The study found that of the 8 million Australian workers who work outside sometimes, mostly, or all of the time, an alarming 57% said their employers did not supply them with sunscreen.

Consumer NZ's sun safety advice: Look for sunscreens with an SPF of at least 30+, plus water resistance and broad-spectrum protection. Apply sunscreen at least 20 minutes before going outside. Apply plenty – about one teaspoonful (5ml) for each arm, each leg, your back, your front and your face (which includes your neck and ears). That adds up to about 35ml for a full-body application. Ignore “once-a-day” claims. Sunscreen should be reapplied often – every two hours you're outside. Mopping up sweat or towelling dry reduces protection: apply another coat of sunscreen immediately.

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