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Young Western Australians experience worst sunburn

A new survey* has found about one in five people living in Western Australia had their worst sunburn experience before their 10th birthday.

The results of the eye-opening survey were released at an event in Perth this morning to launch the Suncorp Bank Shade Tent Giveaway as part of the SunWise program.

The Sunwise Summer Survey found 18% of people living in Western Australia had their worst sunburn experience before they were 10 years old and 61% had their worst sunburn experience when they were between 10 and 20 years of age.

Research Fellow with the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) Dr Louise Winteringham, said the results were particularly disturbing given the damage sun can cause to young skin.

“Some skin cells are especially sensitive to sunlight in the early years,” Dr Winteringham said.

“Studies have shown that excessive exposure to sunlight in childhood dramatically increases the risk of melanoma in later life.”

Suncorp Bank Community Ambassador Adam Gilchrist said sun protection was important at any age but the message was still failing to get through to teenagers and parents of younger children. .

“Studies show a sun tan is anything but good for you, yet the SunWise Summer Survey found a number of Western Australians still believe people with a tan look healthy (59%),” Mr Gilchrist said.

“About 130** people in Western Australia are killed each year by melanoma so when it comes to sun protection there is no room for complacency.

“Squeezing some sunscreen into a busy family life can be challenging but as parents we all have a responsibility to look after ourselves and our kids.

“I’m a big supporter of programs like the Suncorp Bank Shade Tent Giveaway, because it’s a really practical way of helping to protect the community.”

Mr Gilchrist announced the Giveaway at the City Beach Tennis Club in Perth this morning. He also put the racket skills of members to the test.

Suncorp is encouraging clubs, sporting groups and schools across Western Australia to get involved in the Giveaway scheme and apply to win one of twenty 4m x 4m shade structures and a year’s supply of sunscreen.

Suncorp Bank Regional General Manager for Western Australia Michael Goynich said shade tents and sunscreen were a winning combination in the fight against melanoma.

“The SunWise Summer Survey found an increasing number of Western Australians were worried about getting skin cancer (83% up 14% on last year) but the good news is the majority of skin cancers are preventable by taking simple steps such as seeking shade and applying sunscreen,” Mr Goynich said.

“I’d encourage every club, sports group and school across Western Australia to apply to the Giveaway scheme and take advantage of the practical support that’s on offer.”

Suncorp has supported skin cancer awareness and prevention through its SunWise program since 2004.

The SunWise Summer Survey is conducted annually and monitors Australians attitudes to skin cancer and sun protection.

For further information about the SunWise program or the Suncorp Bank Shade Tent Giveaway visit www.suncorpbank.com.au/community

*The SunWise Summer Survey was conducted by Pure Profile.

**Western Australian Cancer Registry (Department of Health WA) <http://www.health.wa.gov.au/wacr/home/>

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About the SKMRC

The SKMRC, which is based within the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research, was established in memory of young Perth golfer, Scott Kirkbride, who lost his battle with melanoma in 2004 at the age of 27. The centre, based in Perth, aims to establish world-class resources to investigate melanoma, with the goal of pinpointing the genetic and environmental causes of the disease.