

# Sun protection and clothing

## Key points

- Wearing protective clothing and hats is one of the best ways to protect your skin from the damaging effects of UV radiation.
- Choose clothing that:
  - covers as much skin as possible
  - is made of tightly woven fabric
  - is a dark colour.
- Clothing may be marked with an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF). The higher the UPF, the more protection the fabric will provide.
- For best protection, always combine sun protective clothing with shade, hats, sunglasses and sunscreen.

## The great cover-up

Wearing clothing and hats is one of the most effective ways to protect your skin from the sun. Clothing provides a barrier between your skin and the damaging effects of UV radiation for as long as you are wearing it, and can't be wiped or washed off.

Clothing such as rash vests, some swimwear, and work and sports uniforms are especially designed for sun protection. However, many clothes in your wardrobe will also provide you with good protection. When selecting sun protective clothing and hats, consider the following.

## What to look for

### Style

- Shirts with collars or high necks, and long or three-quarter length sleeves
- Trousers or longer shorts and skirts that come to below the knees
- Clothing that fits loosely rather than stretched across the skin

- Hats should be wide-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire-style to protect the face, neck and ears. For adults, the brim should be 8cm or more, and for children, 6cm.
- Baseball caps are not recommended as they do not protect the ears, cheeks or neck.

### Fabric

- Look for fabric that has a close, dense weave. Hold the garment up to the light. The less light that passes through the fabric the better protection it will provide.
- Synthetics or mixed fabrics often have a tighter weave than natural fabrics. However, some natural fabrics such as cotton, hemp and linen can also have a tight weave and are lightweight and cool to wear.
- Protection may be reduced if the fabric is stretched (i.e. a tight fit or knitted or elasticised fabrics), wet, or old and worn
- Raffia and straw hats should be finely woven and not allow pinpricks of sunlight to pass through.

### Colour

- Dark colours (navy, black, dark red) absorb UV rays and prevent them from reaching the skin better than white and light colours. However, the closeness of the weave is still more important than the colour of the fabric.
- Avoid light-coloured hat brims that bounce sunlight back onto the face

### Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF)

Fabric and clothing may be labelled with an Ultraviolet Protection Factor or UPF. The UPF is a scale developed to rate how much UV protection a fabric provides. For example, a fabric with a UPF of 10 will allow one tenth (or 10%) of the UV radiation to pass through it, fabric with a UPF of 20 will allow one twentieth (or 5%) of the UV radiation to pass through it and fabric with a UPF of 50 will allow one fiftieth (or 2%) of the UV radiation to pass through it.

For more information visit:

**[www.arpansa.gov.au/services/upf/index.cfm](http://www.arpansa.gov.au/services/upf/index.cfm)**

A UPF rating gives added reassurance about the level of protection provided. Clothing that is likely to have a UPF rating includes school uniforms, swimwear, and clothing designed for outdoor workers. Any fabric rated above UPF30 provides good protection against UV radiation, but 50+ is recommended.

The Australian/New Zealand Standard for Sun Protective Clothing (AS/NZ 4399) describes procedures used for measuring the UPF of fabrics and requirements for labelling UPF-rated clothing:

**[www.standards.com.au](http://www.standards.com.au)**

The table shows the rating system:

UPF rating	% UV radiation absorbed	Protection category
10	90.0	Moderate
15	93.3	Good
20	95.0	Good
30	96.7	Very good
40	97.5	Excellent
50	98.0	Excellent

In addition, some fabrics are specially treated during manufacture to reduce the amount of UV radiation that can pass through them.

### Sports and swimwear

Swimsuits, rash vests, shorts, hats, tops and other active wear rated UPF50+ is readily available and designed to be cool, comfortable and practical to wear.

### Catalogue

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) provides information for consumers about locating suppliers of products that claim to offer protection against solar ultraviolet radiation.

Resource Guide for UV Protective Products:

**[www.arpansa.gov.au/uvrg/main.htm](http://www.arpansa.gov.au/uvrg/main.htm)**

### Further Information

For more information please visit our website:

**[www.cancercouncil.com.au/sunsmart](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/sunsmart)**