



# QUEENSLAND SUN SURVEY SUMMER 1991/1992



*Information Circular No. 12E*



**Executive Release**

**EPIDEMIOLOGY AND HEALTH INFORMATION BRANCH  
HEALTH ADVANCEMENT BRANCH**

Queensland has the highest incidence rates for melanoma in the world, with rates 50% higher than in the next highest Australian state (NSW). The incidence of melanoma is estimated to have quadrupled in the last 20 years, making it now the most commonly occurring cancer. Melanoma causes approximately 140 deaths per year in Queensland. However, unlike some other cancers, deaths due to melanoma are almost completely preventable.

In this context, the findings of a telephone survey of randomly selected Queenslanders aged 14 years and over conducted in the summer of 1991/92 highlight the need for sustained efforts to encourage sun-safe behaviours. These findings indicate that while there have been some improvements in sun protection attitudes and behaviours, there remains considerable room for improvement. Key findings include:

- during last summer, 1 in 5 Queenslanders (27% of males and 18% of females) reported getting sunburnt on the previous weekend. Proposed national health goals and targets call for a halving of this figure by 1995;
- the overall level of sun protection used by Queenslanders outdoors is quite low (see Figure 1). Respondents used sunscreen on only 35% of occasions outdoors compared with a proposed national target of 60% using factor 15 sunscreen by 1995;
- many Queenslanders (29%) do not consider themselves to be at risk of developing skin cancers, and more than one in five do not take special precautions to avoid sunburn. Suntans are in fact highly desirable to many adult Queenslanders, particularly males and those in younger age groups. Overall, 37% indicated that they "like to get a suntan", while nearly half (46%) thought that "a suntanned person looks more healthy";
- many (25%) find it difficult to protect themselves from the sun. Three quarters (75%) agreed that "clothes that fully cover me from the sun are hot and uncomfortable to wear", while one quarter (25%) do not wear such clothing "because some people think it looks silly";
- most attitudes and behaviours showed some gradient with age. In particular, teenagers are very much more likely than older Queenslanders to like to get a suntan. A high proportion of teenagers (31%) reported getting sunburnt the previous weekend and this proportion remained relatively high into the 30-39 year age group;
- on any day of a summer weekend, about half (51%) of the adult population spends significant time outdoors in the midday sun. This was relatively more so for males than females.

Community awareness of skin cancer and sun protection messages was found to be very high, with 97% of respondents having read, seen or heard some relevant advertising or information in the previous six months (see Table 1). The challenge for health authorities is to maintain this awareness and translate it into behavioural change.

## Health Service Responses

Queensland Health's goal is to reduce mortality and morbidity from all skin cancers, and in particular, to halve the death rate from melanoma within 10 years. Three year targets include greater adoption of sun safe behaviour, increased provision of shade in both public and private areas, sun safety policies in workplaces and schools, and increased awareness of the need for skin self examination

Sun protection programs need to focus more on strategies designed to enable people to adopt sun safe behaviours, by making them more desirable and easier choices. Such strategies may include the provision of more shade and other environmental changes, encouraging sun protection behaviour in individuals and in their social networks, and addressing pro suntan beliefs and images. In particular, strategies targeted to the needs of groups such as young teenage males, and strategies focussing on workplaces and schools, local community, sports and leisure environments require further development.

*For further information, see Information Circular No. 12, Queensland Summer Sun Survey, Summer 1991/1992, or contact:*

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Queensland Health sun protection strategies.*

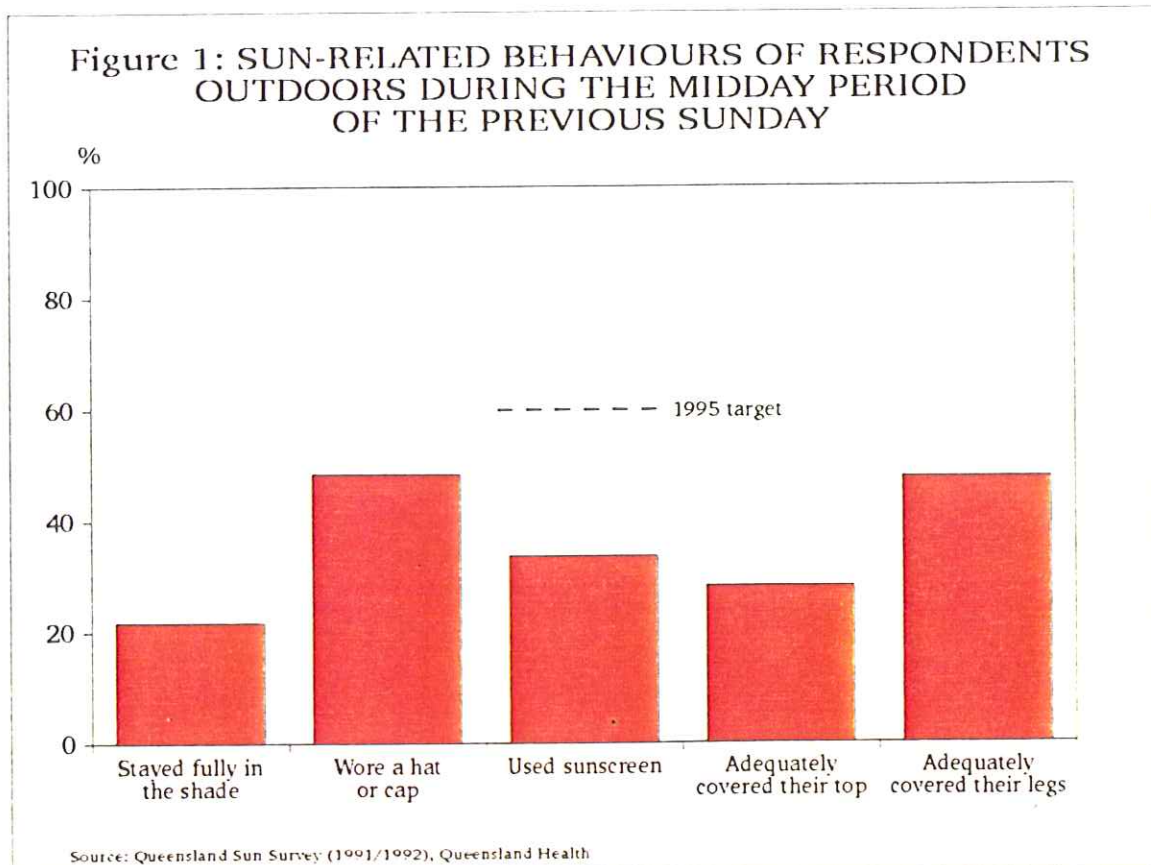
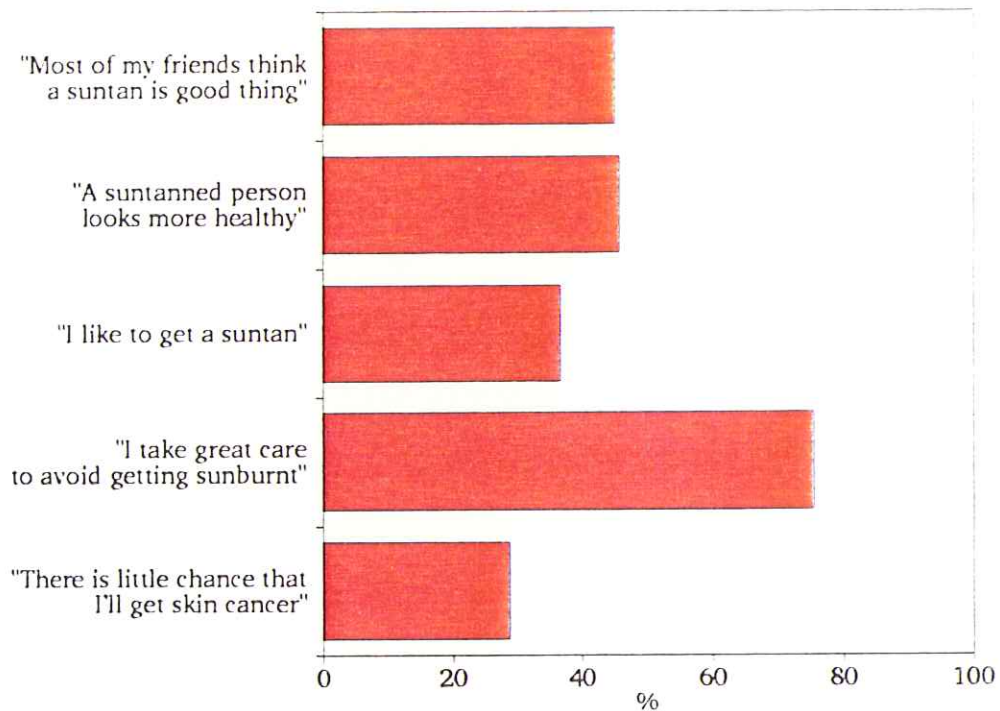
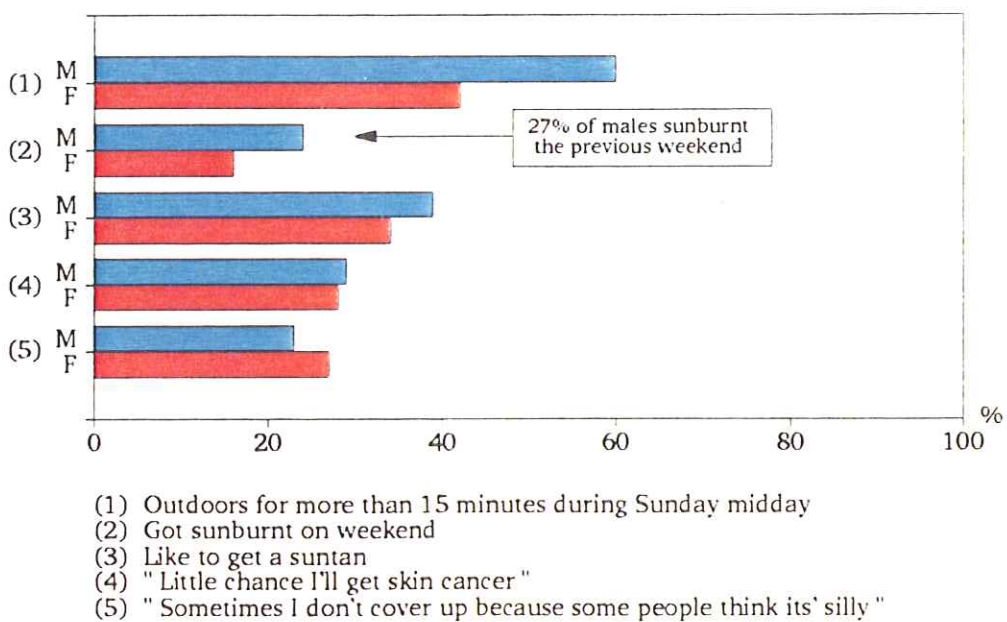


Figure 2: SUN-RELATED ATTITUDES OF RESPONDENTS



Source: Queensland Sun Survey (1991/1992), Queensland Health

Figure 3: SELECTED SUN - RELATED ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS AMONGST MALES AND FEMALES

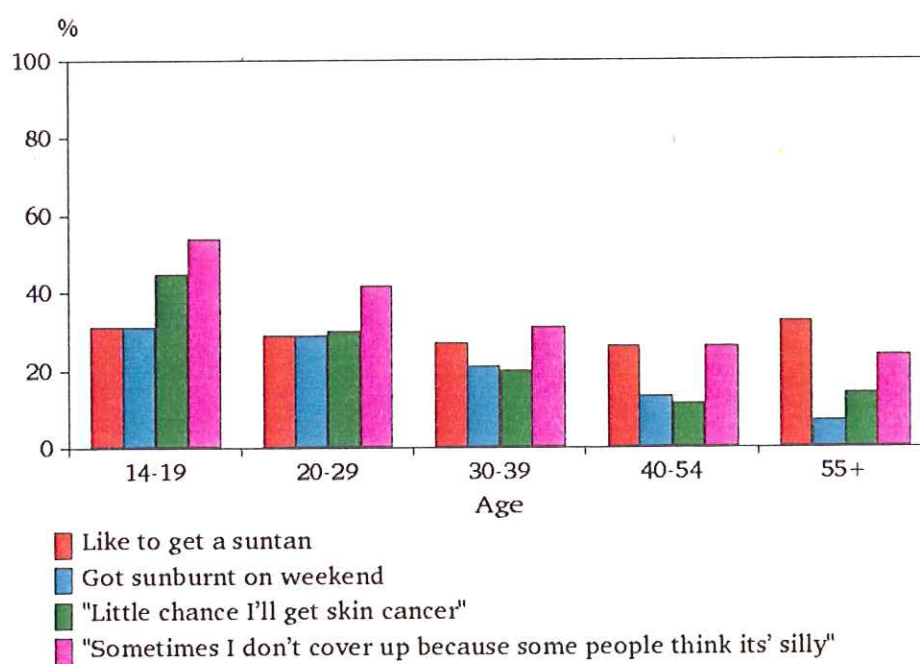


Source: Queensland Sun Survey (1991/1992), Queensland Health

**Table 1: Percentage of respondents having awareness of recent advertising about skin cancer prevention and sun protection, by advertising media**

Media	Percentage
Television	91%
Newspaper	34%
Magazine articles	24%
Radio	23%

**Figure 4: SELECTED SUN - RELATED ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS: IN DIFFERENT AGE GROUP**



Source: Queensland Sun Survey (1991/1992), Queensland Health