

MEDIA RELEASE

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Staying cool by the pool? Here's how to keep your eyes safe this Summer

As Melbourne swelters through yet another sultry day over 35 degrees, experts are reminding us to protect our eyes from harmful sun damage, especially around the water.

The Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA) says people are often aware of the dangers that ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause to the skin but forget about the risks to their eyes.

“The reality is that UV radiation levels can be up to three times higher during Summer than in Winter,” said ophthalmologist Dr Sukhpal Sandhu from CERA.

Too much UV exposure can lead to short-term problems of irritation which is due to inflammation of the cornea. This photokeratitis or sunburn, is similar to snow blindness. Long-term effects can be more serious and include increased risk of cataracts, pterygium (fleshy overgrowth of the conjunctiva), macular degeneration and cancer.

The good news is that simply wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses that meet the Australian Standard reduces your eyes' exposure to UV rays by up to 98%.

“Many people don't realise that reflected sunlight, off the surface of water for example, can actually expose your eyes to UV radiation similar to direct sunlight,” explained Dr Sandhu. “So if you're sitting on the beach or by the pool, even in the shade, wear your hat and sunglasses.”

CERA's Top Summer Eye Health Tips:

- Always wear a wide-brimmed hat as this alone can reduce UV radiation to the eyes by up to 50%.
- Wear sunglasses for better protection, especially those that are close-fitting, with a wrap-around style and meet or exceed the Australian Standard (AS/NZS1067:2003) (look for a lens category of 2, 3 or 4 on the swing tag). Some sunglasses are marked with an Eye Protection Factor (EPF) rating. EPF 9 or 10 exceeds the Australian Standard and blocks almost all UV radiation.
- Avoid sunglasses marked 'Fashion Spectacles' or toy sunglasses for children – these do not meet the Australian Standard and should not be used for sun protection.

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ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR EYE RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

The Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA) is an independent medical research institute established in 1996. CERA has grown into Australia's leading eye research institute and is amongst the top five for research output in the world. We are leading the way in innovative eye research that makes a difference in people's lives.