



American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) Skin Cancer Awareness Month 2026

Practice Sun Safety Survey Fact Sheet

May 2026

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Study Background

Versta Research conducted a national survey of 1,132 U.S. adults on behalf of the American Academy of Dermatology. Sampling was stratified by age, gender, region, race/ethnicity, income, and education, and it was weighted to match current population estimates from the United States Census Bureau. The survey was conducted online from January 19 to February 2, 2026. Assuming no sample bias, the maximum margin of error for full-sample estimates is $\pm 3\%$.

Key Findings

Fewer than **three out of five Americans** regularly use sunscreen, and some are cutting back as a result of their exposure to misinformation.

Three out of five Americans got a suntan in 2025, with most feeling that tanned skin looks healthier and half believing tanning myths.

A third of Americans got a sunburn in 2025, with Gen Z reporting the most severe burns.

One in five Americans rely on Instagram or TikTok posts from influencers for skin care information, and it is the **#1 source cited by Gen Z**.

Substantial numbers are **unaware of all the risks** around tanning, sunburns, and skin cancer, with nearly half getting a grade C or lower on the *Practice Safe Skin* survey quiz.

One-third of Gen Z got a grade D or F.

Key Insights into Americans' Safe Sun Behaviors

Four out of five say that protecting their skin from the sun is more important to them now than it was five years ago. **Over half (54%)** say they protect themselves from the sun now more than they did five years ago.

Though most agree it is important to protect themselves from the sun, substantial numbers are unaware of the following about ultraviolet (UV) rays:

- More than **two out of five (44%)** are unaware that shade protects skin from UV rays.
- **One-quarter (24%)** are unaware that UV rays can penetrate clothing.
- **One in six (16%)** are unaware that UV rays are reflected by snow, water, and sand.

One-third of Americans (33%) were sunburned in 2025, including **almost half of Gen Z (45%)** and **Millennials (45%)**. This is **8 percentage points higher than in 2020**, when the



Survey first launched.

Half of those sunburned report burns severe enough that it affected their physical and/or emotional wellbeing, including **one third** who were so burned that their clothing was uncomfortable, and **one in five** who were so burned they felt embarrassed.

More than a third of Americans are unaware of one or more sunburn risks, including that people can get sunburned on cloudy days, in the winter, and through a car window.

Tanning Practices

Three out of five Americans (60%) got tanned or darker skin in 2025. Of those who got tanned or darker skin in 2025, **more than a third (37%)** did so on purpose – equivalent to nearly 60 million Americans -- either by spending time in the sun to get it (**37%**) and/or by using a tanning bed (**5%**).

One-fifth of Americans (21%) are unaware of one or more of these risks associated with tanning, including that tanning causes premature aging (**11% unaware**) and that tanning beds can cause skin cancer (**12% unaware**).

Half (52%) believe one or more of these tanning myths:

- Tanning is safe as long as one does not burn (**29% believe this is true**).
- Tanning is healthy (**23% believe this is true**).
- A base tan will prevent sunburns (**19% believe this is true**).
- A base tan decreases the risk of skin cancer (**19% believe this is true**).
- Tanning beds are safer than the sun (**13% believe this is true**).

Millennials, especially, are unaware of tanning risks (**29%**) while Gen Z are especially likely to believe tanning myths (**65%**).

Sunscreen Practices and Beliefs

Fewer than **three in five Americans (57%)** regularly use sunscreen, and regular usage drops to just 21% on cloudy days. Women are far more likely than men to say they always use sunscreen (**35%, versus 19%**).

Half (53%) say they often forget to apply sunscreen, and **nearly as many (48%)** say they would wear sunscreen more often but forget to bring it with them.

38% of sunscreen users typically reapply sunscreen every two hours. **One in four (28%)**



tend not to reapply sunscreen at all, and this is **especially true for men (34%, versus 23% of women)**.

One in four consumers (23%) use sunscreen only when nagged by other people, which is **especially true for men (30%, vs. 16% of women) and for Gen Z (32%)**.

While nine out of ten (90%) are aware that sunscreen can prevent sunburn, more than **two out of five (43%)** are unaware of other important benefits to using sunscreen, including:

- Sunscreen can prevent skin cancer **(30% unaware)**.
- Sunscreen can prevent development of dark spots on skin **(26% unaware)**.
- Sunscreen can prevent premature skin aging **(21% unaware)**.

One in nine Americans (11%) believe they don't need to use sunscreen because of their skin tone. This is especially true among Black Americans, with **nearly a third (30%)** believing they do not need to use sunscreen because of their skin tone. It is also more common among Gen Z, with **one in six (16%)** believing they do not need to use sunscreen because of their skin tone.

Fewer than half of Americans (47%) know the AAD-recommended minimum of SPF 30 for sunscreen or other skin care products. Awareness is especially low among Gen Z **(37%)** and among men **(41%, versus 52% of women)**.

Nor do most Americans fully understand what SPF means in terms of protection levels and usage:

- **More than two-thirds (68%)** incorrectly believe that SPF 30 offers twice as much protection as SPF 15.
- **A third (35%)** believe that high-SPF sunscreens can be applied less frequently.
- **Nearly as many (30%)** incorrectly believe that skin care products containing SPF offer all-day protection from the sun.

Just one in four Americans (27%) know the AAD-recommended minimum amount of sunscreen to apply (at least 2 tablespoons).

Gen Z Safe Sun Behaviors

One in five Americans rely on Instagram or TikTok posts for skin care information, and it is the #1 source cited by Gen Z. **Half of Gen Z** rely on Instagram or TikTok posts for information about taking care of their skin, with **over a third (36%)** saying it is the most



important source they rely on.

Eleven percent (11%) of Gen Z report a sunburn in 2025 that caused blisters. Gen Z are especially unaware of the risks associated with sunburn (**54% unaware of one or more**).

20% of Gen Z say getting a tan is more important to them than preventing skin cancer, compared to 14% of the general population.

Misinformation and Online Influence

Almost half (47% — and especially Gen Z, 64%) report having seen or heard online misinformation about sunscreen, including posts about sunscreens being toxic and dangerous.

More than one in five (22%) believe that sunscreen blocks people from getting the amount of vitamin D they need.

Parents and Children

Virtually all parents (**97%**) feel it is important to protect their children's skin from the sun (**86% very important**).

Most parents (98%) report taking steps to protect their children's skin from the sun, especially with sunscreen, shade, and/or hats.

Parents report children getting sunburns at increasingly higher rates over the past few years, as well:

- **Two out of five parents (39%)** have children who got a sunburn in 2025, a significant increase of 16 percentage points from 2020 (23% reported children with sunburns in 2020).
- **Seven percent (7%)** report their children having sunburns that were so severe they caused blisters.

Antiaging

Half of all U.S. adults are concerned about their skin aging prematurely. Women, especially, express concern about premature skin aging (60%, versus 40% of men).

More than **four in ten U.S. adults** have wrinkles or spots on their skin they think are related to sun exposure, and a **large majority of those adults (64%)** feel bothered by it. Women,



especially, report wrinkles or spots on their skin (**51%, versus 35% of men**) and feel bothered by it (**74%, versus 50% of men**).

While nine out of ten Americans are aware that sun exposure will age their skin, **one in five** are unaware that sunscreen can prevent premature skin aging.

Four out of five Americans say they use products or procedures specifically to prevent premature skin aging, including:

- Sunscreen (**62%**)
- Moisturizers (**58%**)
- Anti-aging serums or creams (**24%**)
- Anti-wrinkle tapes or similar products (**6%**)
- Botox or other cosmetic procedures (**4%**)

Skin Cancer

Nearly two out of five (38%) have spots on their skin they keep an eye on just in case changes might indicate cancer.

A large majority of survey respondents (69%) have at least one characteristic that elevates their risk for skin cancer (skin tone, eye color, number of moles, family history, etc.). But **far fewer (39%)** express concern about developing skin cancer in their lifetime, even among those with characteristics that put them at risk (**43%**). Concern about skin cancer is especially low among Gen Z (**just 25%**).

Practice Safe Sun Survey Quiz

Looking back on 2025, **two-thirds (67%)** give themselves an overall grade of “excellent” or “good” for sun protection, while **one-third (33%)** give themselves an overall grade of “poor” or “fair.”

37 questions in the Practice Safe Sun survey tested consumer knowledge about sun exposure, protection, tanning, sunburns, and skin cancer. Using a traditional grading scheme applied to all 37 knowledge and awareness questions, **just one in six Americans (16%) get a grade of “A,” while:**

- 37% get a grade of “B”



- 24% get a grade of “C”
- 10% get a grade of “D”
- 12% get a grade of “F”

One-third of Gen Z (32%) get a grade of D or F.

About the AAD

Headquartered in Rosemont, Ill., the American Academy of Dermatology, founded in 1938, is the largest, most influential and most representative of all dermatologic associations. With a membership of more than 21,500 physicians worldwide, the AAD is committed to advancing the diagnosis and medical, surgical, and cosmetic treatment of the skin, hair, and nails; advocating high standards in clinical practice, education and research in dermatology; and supporting and enhancing patient care because skin, hair, and nail conditions can have a serious impact on your health and well-being. For more information, contact the AAD at (888) 462-DERM (3376) or aad.org. Follow @AADskin on [Facebook](#), [TikTok](#), [Pinterest](#), and [YouTube](#), and @AADskin1 on [Instagram](#).

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