

Media Announcement

Tanning drug gives extra protection following research showing sunscreens are failing, say leading dermatologists in the US and Australia

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New research by the Melanoma and Skin Cancer Research Institute at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, indicating that ultraviolet-A light – now found to be a serious cause of skin cancer and which is not blocked out by many sunscreens – represents a further reason to develop and use an Australian drug which produces melanin and which protects against both forms of UV light, dermatologists in the US and Australia said today.

Research from Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital – led by Dr Nita Agar and published in the latest issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* – shows that many sunscreens do not block out UVA light, which scientists now believe leads to potentially cancer-causing mutations.

Dr James Spencer, Vice Chairman Dermatology at New York's Mt Sinai School of Medicine, acknowledges that many sunscreens do not give people the protection that they want, and that melanin-producing drug Melanotan – which human trials have proven helps protect people against sunburn – would allow people to develop a tan, while pushing the sun-safe message.

"The current sunscreens are not perfect," Dr Spencer said. "They come off, people don't put them on enough, and yet we still recommend the regular use of sunscreens because it's the best we've got. The population clearly is not going to spend the rest of their lives living in a cave. Nor do we want them to. We'd like people to be able to enjoy life, to work and to go to sports in a safe fashion. I think potentially having natural melanin which would be evenly distributed is probably going to be a better UV blocker than our current sunscreens."

Dr Spencer said that Americans currently spend \$US 5 billion a year on tanning salons, which indicates the demand in the US for cosmetic tans.

"People want a cosmetic tan and many are not very interested in the health message. We physicians want to give a health message. We don't want them tanning. So Melanotan offers a way to bridge this gap. The public want the cosmetic tan, they can achieve it safely. The doctors want to protect the public from skin cancers and this is a way to do it."

Professor Ross Barnetson, a dermatologist at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, recently headed a clinical trial into the protective qualities of melanin. Volunteers in the trial were subject to both UVA and UVB radiation before and after a regime of Melanotan and levels of sunburn were measured.

"The fair-skinned people who took Melanotan had half the skin damage after they took the drug compared to before," he said. "The results showed that fair-skinned people who have developed a tan are less likely to burn."

The latest research into the dangers of UVA light and the inadequacy of some sunscreens further supports research last year in Britain, which indicated that many sunscreens do not block out harmful UVA light. Professor Roy Sanders, a consultant plastic surgeon with the Restoration of Appearance and Function Trust (RAFT), said sunscreens were inadequate at blocking out UVA light, which can cause melanoma.

Until now scientists thought that ultraviolet-B light was by far the most dangerous form of light. However researchers in both Australia and the USA now say that UVA light causes more skin cancer than previously thought.

"The problem is that many people have been using sunscreens under the assumption that they are protected from all forms of cancer-causing UV light," said Dr Wayne Millen, Managing Director of EpiTan Limited, the company developing Melanotan. "Many people have been taking in unhealthy levels of UVA light in the process."

"Clearly, greater protection is needed in the fight against skin cancer, which is where Melanotan fits in. Melanotan stimulates the production of melanin in the skin, giving people a natural protective tan without prolonged sun exposure. It gives people more protection for the time that they have to spend in the sun – just like wearing shirts and hats – and would be used in conjunction with other skin-protection methods. Importantly, melanin does not discriminate against UVA and UVB light. It protects against both."

In the pivotal Phase II human trials, Melanotan was tested on 81 volunteers of varying skin types. The results of the trial, released in November last year, were:

- Sunburn injury was reduced by more than 50% in the fair-skinned volunteers who had Melanotan and who were subject to both UVA and UVB light
- There was a highly-significant increase in skin melanin in Melanotan-treated volunteers
- And fairer-skin volunteers recorded increases in melanin of up to 100% in some areas

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