

Why misguided influencers are wrong to ditch sunscreen during Europe's record-breaking heatwave



“Sunlight increases your body’s production of Vitamin D which fights cancer. [Sunscreen](#) is full of chemicals that cause cancer.”

That is one of the claims spreading across social media as Europe experiences [soaring temperatures](#), with influencers and podcasters urging people to ditch sunscreen.

“Even if you wash your face, sunscreen stays on your [skin](#) and increases your chances of getting cancer,” another social media user said.

But experts told *The Independent* the claims are misleading, and there is no evidence that sunscreen increases the risk of [skin cancer](#).

The posts, amplified by viral hashtags across all platforms, are part of a long-running [conspiracy theory](#) that frequently resurfaces during periods of hot weather. According to TikTok, the hashtag #antispf has been banned since 2025, but similar claims continue to circulate across all social media platforms.

One of the central arguments behind the theory is that skin cancer rates have risen as sunscreen has become increasingly widespread since the 1940s. However, experts warn that this is not evidence that sunscreen causes cancer.

US-based cosmetic chemist John Dombrowski told *The Independent*: “It’s the perfect example of correlation [not] equat[ing] to causation.”

Melanoma skin cancer incidence rates have [increased by](#) more than 164 per cent in the UK since the early 1990s, while rates have increased by 26 per cent in the past decade, according to Cancer Research UK.

The charity suggests several reasons are driving the rise in cases, including the growing and ageing population in the UK, which naturally increases the number of cancer cases overall. Awareness of melanoma is also increasing, and medical tools to detect it are improving.

The [conspiracy theory](#) has been amplified by influencers and podcasters, with claims ranging from sunscreen containing “toxic” ingredients that have not been approved by drug regulators, to suggestions that people should deliberately seek out more sunlight to protect themselves from cancer.

Anthony Young, professor of experimental photobiology and dermatology at King’s College London, said: “People often use their sunscreens incorrectly. In other words, they don’t apply enough, so they get much less protection than they think they’ve got.

“There are studies, for example, that show that people who use sunscreens get more sunburn, and that’s not because the sunscreens are causing sunburn. It’s because they haven’t applied them properly, so they’ve got a false sense of security.”

According to the NHS, adults should aim to apply around six to eight teaspoons of sunscreen to cover the entire body, and it needs to be applied to all exposed skin. It should also be applied 30 minutes before going out, and reapplied straight after sweating or swimming, or otherwise every two hours while out in the sun.

The conspiracy theory falsely claims that chemicals in sunscreen are what increase the risk of cancer among those who use it.

A recent study found that 59 per cent of Americans worry about sunscreen chemicals, according to the [Melanoma Research Alliance](#). But the presence of chemicals in sunscreen does not, in itself, mean the products are dangerous.

Mr Dombrowski said: “Everything with mass is a chemical. Air, your chair, your blankets, it’s all a chemical.”

Regulation of sunscreen differs between countries. In the US, sunscreen is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as an over-the-counter drug. In the UK, sunscreen products are generally regulated as cosmetics under the UK Cosmetics Regulation.

Mr Dombrowski added: “It is an over-the-counter drug. It has to go through rigorous FDA testing, through over-the-counter [reviews], through stability. It is very difficult not just to formulate a sunscreen, but to bring one to market.”

Professor Young said sunscreens in the UK are also subject to stringent safety and efficacy requirements.

“To get a sunscreen approved is a vast amount of work for the company that manufactures the filters. You need truckloads of documents. They go through stringent tests in terms of efficacy and safety,” he added.

TikTok did not provide a comment, but said its [community guidelines](#) prohibit misleading or false content that could cause significant harm. In 2024, it launched a UK clinician-creator network featuring 19 NHS-qualified staff members with more than 2.2 million followers.

TikTok also said the videos flagged by *The Independent* had been labelled “not recommended” for the “for you” feed and restricted to adults, under its “for you” feed eligibility standards.

Meta has been contacted for comment.

Anyone who notices an unusual mark, lump or mole on their skin can look at the [Cancer Research UK website](#) for symptoms, and should speak to their GP.

