



## **Sun Protection Practice in the Sport Sector: a focus group study**

Sport is entrenched into Australian culture from childhood through to older adulthood. Participating in sports can therefore contribute strongly to lifetime solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation exposure, the main risk factor for skin cancer. There is an increased risk of sunburn and long-term skin damage among people involved in outdoor sports, and sun-protection is often inadequate<sup>1</sup>.

Research consistently highlights the importance of sun-protection strategies, such as sunscreen, clothing, and shade, in mitigating the risk of high sun exposure. Several Australian sporting organisations have implemented sun-safety policies to protect athletes from the harmful effects of UV radiation. These policies are particularly important given Australia's high levels of UV radiation and high incidence of skin cancer. However, there is limited evidence about sun exposure in outdoor sports<sup>2</sup>, and more information is needed about what policies are in place, how they are implemented, and what strategies would be useful to players and sport bodies to improve sun-safety.

This study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of current sun-safety practices in Queensland sport settings, including how these practices are implemented and where improvements may be needed. We aimed to generate valuable insights into effective strategies, existing challenges, and opportunities for further action to better protect athletes, coaches, spectators, and staff from sun exposure.

We conducted seven online focus groups across two participant levels: (1) players, spectators, and sports club members, and (2) staff from peak sports organisations. Participants were contacted via email through a sports-affiliated member of Skin Cancer Prevention Queensland, targeting individuals involved in a range of outdoor team sports. Interested individuals completed a Qualtrics survey to provide demographic and sport-related information. All participants received a participant information sheet and provided informed consent online prior to the focus group. Focus groups averaged 60 minutes and comprised between 2-4 individuals. Transcripts were analysed using content analysis to identify recurring themes present in participant responses, in addition to lists of barriers, enablers, and suggested actions.

# Sun Protection Practice in the Sport Sector: a focus group study

Skin Cancer Prevention Queensland

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Group 1 (club level members) n=16  
Group 2 (sporting organisations) n=6

AFL, Soccer, Cricket, Touch Football,  
Netball, Rowing, Hockey, Surf Life Saving  
and Tennis



## Hierarchy of Controls\*

### ENABLERS

HIGHEST LEVEL OF PROTECTION  
MOST RELIABLE CONTROL MEASURE

#### Level 1

##### Eliminate the hazards

- Permanent Shade (Seek)
- Scheduling - night time games
- Indoor venue
- Roof cover

### BARRIERS

- Availability (limited infrastructure)
- **Budget** (Repair & maintenance costs)
- Shared venue (cannot build due to lease restrictions)

#### Level 2

- **Scheduling - outside of peak UV**
- Portable shade
- Staff and volunteer policy training
- Substitute the hazard with something safer
- Isolate the hazard from people
- Reduce the risks through engineering controls

- Lack of lighting
- **Shared venue** (limited evening/night availability)

#### Level 3

- Promotion of sun safety
- presentations
- newsletter and social media resources
- **Role models** - athletes, local champions, trainers and officials
- Education
- Enhance visibility of sun protection at events
- **Policy**
- Partnership with local council and state level with community clubs
- Uniform (Slap)
- Sunscreen use (Slop)
- **On vs. Off field protection**
- Reduce the level of harm using administrative actions
- Use personal protective equipment

LOWEST LEVEL OF PROTECTION  
LEAST RELIABLE CONTROL MEASURE

- **Sporting culture**
- **Lack of fun and engaging resources** (budget, time)
- Community resistance
- Priority (lack of regular reinforcement of policy)
- **Inconsistency** (e.g Extreme heat policy more prominent)
- **Personal responsibility**
- **Uniform** considerations (comfort, performance, cost, availability)

\*source: Safe Work Australia

To interpret the focus group findings, we applied Safe Work Australia's risk management principles. Central to this is the Hierarchy of Control—a ranked framework that is structured into three levels<sup>3</sup>. This hierarchy informed both the categorisation of focus group findings and the development of the diagram above, which visually represents enablers and barriers across three consolidated levels of control. Enablers are positioned on the left and barriers on the right, highlighting the relational dynamics between what facilitates and what impedes risk control at each level. The bolded enablers and barriers represent sentiments that were reflected in a number of focus groups across both participant categories.

Our findings indicate that the majority of enablers and barriers are concentrated in Levels 2 and 3. This reflects the practical realities of sport settings, where complete elimination of UV exposure is unlikely for outdoor sport. Importantly, rather than viewing the levels as sequential steps, our analysis supports a concurrent approach— where strengthening protective measures across all levels concurrently could offer the most effective strategy for mitigating the risks associated with high sun exposure.

**References:**

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