

Preventing Skin Cancer: The Nation's Most Common Cancer

AT-A-GLANCE
2000



Choose Your Cover



Get a hat.



Seek shade.



Cover up.



Rub it on.



Grab shades.

"We want to educate young people to develop healthy sun behaviors now that will help them avoid developing deadly skin cancer later."

Donna E. Shalala, PhD
Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Skin Cancer: A Largely Preventable Cancer

The Burden of Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. The three major types of skin cancer are the highly curable basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas and the more serious malignant melanoma. The American Cancer Society estimates that a combined total of about 1 million new cases of basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas and an additional 47,700 new cases of malignant melanoma will be diagnosed in 2000. In 2000 alone, skin cancer will claim the lives of almost 9,600 people.

Although death rates from basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas are low, these cancers can cause considerable damage and disfigurement if they are left untreated. However, when detected and treated early, more than 95% of these carcinomas can be cured.

Malignant melanoma, the most rapidly increasing form of cancer in the United States, causes more than 75% of all deaths from skin cancer. This disease can spread to other organs, most commonly the lungs and liver. Malignant melanoma diagnosed at an early stage can usually be cured, but melanoma diagnosed at a late stage is more likely to spread and cause death.

Who Is at Risk?

Although anyone can get skin cancer, people with certain characteristics are particularly at risk. The risk factors for skin cancer are

- Fair to light skin complexion.
- Family history of skin cancer.
- Personal history of skin cancer.
- Chronic exposure to the sun.
- History of sunburns early in life.
- Atypical moles.
- A large number of moles.
- Freckles (an indicator of sun sensitivity and sun damage).

Preventing Skin Cancer

Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays appears to be the most important factor in the development of skin cancer. Skin cancer is largely preventable when sun protection measures are consistently used. However, approximately 70% of American adults do not protect themselves from the sun's dangerous rays. According to the results of CDC's 1992 National Health Interview Survey,

- Only 30% of adults sought shade.
- Only 28% wore protective clothing when exposed to sunlight.
- Only 32% routinely used sunscreen lotion.

Three-fourths of adults reported that their children (aged 12 and younger) used some form of sun protection, according to the results of a 1997 American Academy of Dermatology household telephone survey. However, specific sun protection measures reported by adults for their children varied:

- 54% of children sought shade.
- 27% wore hats, and 8% wore shirts.
- 53% used sunscreen.

These results highlight the need for educating children and adults about the preventive measures that can be taken to reduce or avoid UV exposure. Research suggests that healthy behavior patterns established in early childhood often persist throughout life. Parents, health care providers, schools, and community organizations can play a major role in reinforcing sun protection behaviors (e.g., staying out of direct sunlight or timing outdoor activities for hours when UV light is less intense) and changing attitudes about exposure to the sun (e.g., the opinion that a person looks more attractive with a tan).

“There is good news: skin cancer can be prevented. The challenge, however, lies in changing the attitudes and behaviors that increase a person's risk of developing skin cancer.”

—David Satcher, MD, PhD, Assistant Secretary for Health and Surgeon General

CDC's National Leadership

CDC's skin cancer prevention and education efforts are designed to reduce illness and death and help achieve the *Healthy People 2000* and *Healthy People 2010* skin cancer prevention goals. The 2000 target goals are to increase to at least 60% the proportion of people of all ages who (1) limit their sun exposure, (2) use sunscreen and wear protective clothing when they are exposed to sunlight, and (3) avoid artificial sources of UV light.

With fiscal year 2000 appropriations of \$1.7 million, CDC's skin cancer activities include epidemiological research and surveillance, a multimedia health communications campaign, support for coalitions and intervention demonstration projects, and the creation of national and federal councils on skin cancer prevention. Highlights of these activities follow.

Collecting Vital Information

CDC develops epidemiological research and monitoring systems to determine national trends in sun protection behaviors and attitudes about sun exposure. Findings are being used to better target and evaluate skin cancer prevention efforts. CDC's state-based Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System now collects information in all states on the incidence of sun overexposure and sunburns in the past year. Likewise, CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System collects information on sunscreen use among U.S. adolescents.

Getting the Message Out

Launched in 1998, CDC's national skin cancer prevention campaign, "Choose Your Cover," is designed to change social norms by promoting the acceptability of behaviors to protect skin and the desirability of skin that is free of the damaging effects of sun exposure.

The campaign features public service announcements aired by major TV

networks, network affiliates, and cable stations nationwide. Individual states have extended the reach of the national campaign. Thirteen states chose to tailor these broadcast public service announcements with their state name and local information. Other states are helping to market the campaign's public service announcements for local placement.



Choose Your Cover

www.cdc.gov/ChooseYourCover

Building Critical Partnerships

CDC has convened the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention to facilitate national skin cancer awareness and prevention efforts.

The Council has established the following objectives:



**National Council on
Skin Cancer Prevention**

- To increase skin cancer awareness and prevention behaviors among all populations, with special emphasis on populations at high risk.
- To develop and support partnerships to extend and reinforce core messages for behavior change.
- To coordinate a public health response to nationwide efforts to reduce skin cancer incidence and deaths.
- To develop a national skin cancer prevention and education plan.

CDC has also convened a Federal Council on Skin Cancer Prevention to promote sun-safe behaviors among federal agency employees, their families, and agency constituents.

National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention

American Academy of Dermatology
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Health Education
American Cancer Society
American Public Health Association
American School Health Association
Association of State and Territorial Directors of
Chronic Disease Programs
Association of State and Territorial Directors of Health
Promotion and Public Health Education
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Melanoma Research Foundation
National Association of Physicians for the
Environment
National Association of School Nurses, Inc.
National Cancer Institute
National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and
Skin Diseases
National Medical Association
Skin Cancer Foundation
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

CDC Support for Skin Cancer Prevention Education Initiatives

CDC currently funds four skin cancer prevention demonstration projects targeting children, parents, and caregivers to reduce illness and deaths from skin cancer.

- **Sunwise Stampede**, developed by San Diego State University, promotes sun-safe behaviors among



zoological park visitors aged 12 years and younger. The project consists of discount coupons for children's brimmed hats and sunscreen from the zoo gift

shop, an informational tip sheet about sun protection strategies, children's activities that use animal analogies to describe sun-safe behaviors, and environmental prompts throughout the zoo to encourage these behaviors.

- **Pool Cool**, developed by the University of Hawaii and Boston University School of Medicine, is provided at public swimming sites to increase skin cancer prevention awareness and practices among children aged 5–10 years and their parents, lifeguards, and pool managers. The project also works to increase environmental supports and policies for skin cancer prevention, including the availability of portable shading, particularly during recreational swimming periods.



- **The National Coalition for Skin Cancer Prevention in Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Youth Sports**, sponsored by the American Association for Health Education, is developing a national action plan for providing skin cancer prevention education to professionals and volunteers who work with youth sports programs, outdoor school

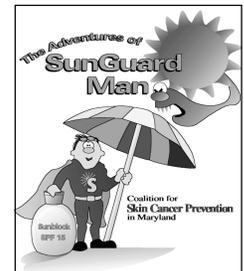


“Educating children and their caregivers about the need for sun safety, although important, is not sufficient. We also must strive to change the environments, such as zoos and recreational parks, in which children experience long bouts of UV exposure.”

—Joni Mayer, PhD, San Diego State University School of Public Health

activities, parks and recreation programs, and elementary- and middle-school health education. The coalition has developed a skin cancer prevention Web site (www.sunsafety.org) and will use this and other channels to disseminate skin cancer prevention messages and materials nationwide. The coalition is also developing a skin cancer action kit to help member organizations assess their skin cancer prevention programs.

- **The Coalition for Skin Cancer Prevention in Maryland**, coordinated by the Maryland State Medical Society, develops skin cancer prevention education that targets children aged 10–13 years and their parents and caregivers. The coalition's middle-school educational program, SunGuard Your Skin, reached over 15,000 seventh graders in 1999. The coalition's multimedia Web site



(www.sunguardman.org) features *The Adventures of SunGuard Man*, an animated cartoon with sound effects and narration. A SunGuard Man mascot has handed out sunscreen and educational materials at numerous community and sporting events throughout the summer. Photos from these events are also on the Web site.

For more information or additional copies of this document, please contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Mail Stop K-64, 4770 Buford Highway NE, Atlanta, GA 30341-3717, (770) 488-4751. Voice Information System: 1 (888) 842-6355 Fax: (770) 488-4760 cancerinfo@cdc.gov <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer>