



National Skin Cancer Prevention Education Program

AT-A-GLANCE
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“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, Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common and most rapidly increasing form of cancer in the United States. One in five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. In 1997 alone, skin cancer will claim the lives of almost 10,000 people.

The three major types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and the more serious melanoma. An estimated one million new cases of highly curable basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas will be detected in 1997; about 40,300 new cases of melanoma will be diagnosed.

Basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas, also called nonmelanoma skin cancer, can cause substantial illness, but death rates from these cancers are low. If detected and treated early, these carcinomas have a cure rate of greater than 95%. Untreated, they can cause considerable damage and disfigurement.

Melanoma causes more than 75% of all deaths from skin cancer. This disease can spread to other organs, most commonly the lungs and liver. Melanoma detected early can usually be cured, but melanoma detected late is more likely to spread and cause death.

Preventing Skin Cancer

Deaths and illnesses from skin cancer can be decreased or avoided by reducing sun exposure. However, most Americans do not protect themselves from the sun's dangerous rays. According to the results of the 1992 National Health Interview Survey, of the adults surveyed,

- Only 32% limited their exposure to the sun.
- Only 29% routinely used sunscreen lotion.
- Only 28% wore protective clothing when exposed to sunlight.

Recent studies have found that many adults know little about skin cancer and its risk factors. In a national survey of adults aged 18 years and older conducted by the American Academy of Dermatology in 1995, approximately 50% of men and 35% of women did not recognize the term *melanoma*. The youngest adults in the survey (aged 18–24 years) were the least knowledgeable about risk factors, early warning signs, and the sites on the body where melanoma most commonly occurs.

Prevention education is as important for children as it is for adults. Sun exposure during childhood (up to 18 years old) is estimated to account for almost 80% of a person's lifetime sun exposure, so children have the greatest potential to benefit from sun protection measures. In addition, healthy behavior patterns established in early childhood often persist throughout life. Parents, health care providers, schools, and community organizations can develop and provide strategies that reinforce sun protection behaviors (e.g., staying out of direct sunlight or timing outdoor activities for hours when ultraviolet light is less intense) and change attitudes about exposure to the sun (e.g., the opinion that a person looks more attractive with a tan).

Measures to Prevent Skin Cancer

Reduce direct exposure to the sun, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. If you must be out in the sun, take the following precautions:

- *Wear a broad-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and sunglasses.*
- *Use sunscreen lotion with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 to protect against ultraviolet (UV) A and B rays.*
- *Refer to the daily UV Index on your local weather forecast when planning outdoor activities.*

In addition, avoid artificial sources of UV light, such as tanning beds and sun lamps.



Who Is at Risk?

The risk factors for squamous cell and basal cell carcinomas are

- Light skin color.
- Family history of skin cancer.
- Personal history of skin cancer.
- Chronic exposure to the sun (squamous cell carcinoma).
- History of severe sunburns early in life (basal cell carcinoma).

The risk factors for melanoma are

- Light skin color.
- Family history of melanoma.
- Personal history of melanoma.
- Certain types and a large number of moles.
- Freckles (an indicator of sun sensitivity and sun damage).
- History of severe sunburns early in life.



CDC's National Skin Cancer Prevention Education Program

The National Skin Cancer Prevention Education Program is designed to help the nation achieve the skin cancer prevention goals established by the Healthy People 2000 National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives. The Healthy People 2000 target goal is to increase to at least 60% the proportion of people of all ages who (1) limit their sun exposure, (2) use sunscreens and wear protective clothing when they are exposed to sunlight, and (3) avoid artificial sources of UV light.

In its fourth year and with FY 1997 appropriations of \$1.8 million, CDC's National Skin Cancer Prevention Education Program includes the following highlights:

- Coordinating national efforts to prevent skin cancer.
- Developing partnerships with other federal agencies, professional organizations, voluntary organizations, and the private sector to educate the public about preventing skin cancer.
- Participating in the National Melanoma/Skin Cancer Detection and Prevention Awareness media campaign conducted each year in May.
- With the American Academy of Dermatology, cosponsoring a series of national conferences for experts in health, media, industry, and education to share ideas about ways to communicate sun protection messages to children, parents, and caregivers.

What Is the UV Index Program?

The UV Index is a public health education and information tool reported by meteorologists in 58 U.S. cities as a daily forecast of the levels of UV rays. The Index predicts UV levels on a scale of 0 to 10+, representing minimal to very high exposure. CDC is collaborating with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Weather Service to improve the effectiveness of the UV Index program. Through surveys, the federal partners are gathering information about the public's use of the UV Index and knowledge of skin cancer. Project activities have included

- *Meeting with weather broadcasters, health educators, skin cancer experts, and corporate sponsors to review the survey results.*
- *Evaluating the differences in sun protection practices and knowledge between respondents in the 58 cities reporting the UV Index and respondents living in 168 other U.S. cities.*
- *Developing a safe-sun packet for broadcast meteorologists that includes guidelines for delivering effective messages and information on materials available for distribution.*

- In partnership with the University of Alabama at Birmingham Prevention Center, developing national guidelines for education programs and sun protection policies in schools and communities. The guidelines will address sun protection education for children in day care, pre-K, and grades K–12 and their parents, caregivers, and instructors. When the guidelines are completed, a national marketing and dissemination campaign will be developed.
- Supporting the development, implementation, and evaluation of innovative strategies for skin cancer prevention education in five state health departments. Through funding from CDC, the five states will implement these strategies in collaboration with parent groups, community advisory boards, elementary school education departments, local and county health departments, day care centers, voluntary organizations, medical schools, cancer research institutes, dermatologists, and the American Cancer Society.
- Supporting the development and evaluation of two skin cancer prevention and detection curricula for public health nurses, one at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill and the other at the University of Texas (UT) Houston Health Science Center. UNC has developed and conducted a 5-hour continuing education teleconference. UT's 1-week course provides both didactic and clinical instruction.
- Participating in efforts to develop and enhance national skin cancer surveillance data.
- Developing epidemiological research and surveillance systems for monitoring program effectiveness and national trends in sun protection behavior and attitudes about exposure to the sun.

What Five States Are Doing in Sun Protection Education

- *Arizona's "Best Practices Sun Safety Awareness Program" is advocating for sun protection policies, education, and training for parents, caregivers, and day care staff.*
- *California is developing sun protection education and training for parents, caregivers, and preschool staff. In addition, a radio public service announcement—recorded by children—is being developed for preschoolers.*
- *Georgia's "Got Youth Covered" project is aimed at improving the sun protection knowledge and personal practices of young people, parents, coaches, team sponsors and leaders, day camp instructors, and outdoor recreational staff.*
- *Hawaii's "SunSmart" initiative is training parents and recreational staff through the Summer Fun programs. In addition, the initiative provides the children in these programs with sunscreen, hats, shaded areas to play in, games, educational activities, and incentive gifts.*
- *Massachusetts' "Ban the Burn Safe Skin Project" is developing education programs for children, parents, and caregivers in hospitals, in elementary schools, and throughout a coastal community.*

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
cancerinfo@cdc.gov
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dcpc>