



National Skin Cancer Prevention Education Program

AT-A-GLANCE

1998



“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
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common and most rapidly increasing 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. A combined total of approximately 1 million new cases of basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas will be detected in 1998; about 41,600 new cases of malignant melanoma will be diagnosed. In 1998 alone, skin cancer will claim the lives of almost 9,200 people.

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

Malignant melanoma 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?

The risk factors for skin cancer 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 and malignant melanoma).
- Certain types and a large number of moles (malignant melanoma).
- Freckles as an indicator of sun sensitivity and sun damage (malignant melanoma).

Preventing Skin Cancer

Overexposure to solar ultraviolet (UV) rays is the most important behavioral risk factor for the development of skin cancer. 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 30% sought shade.
- Only 28% wore protective clothing when exposed to sunlight.
- Only 32% routinely used sunscreen lotion.

Therefore, educating children and adults about the measures that can be taken to reduce or avoid UV exposure is important.

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).

Measures to Prevent Skin Cancer

When possible, reduce direct exposure to the sun, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. When direct sun cannot be avoided,

- *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 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.





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 listed in *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 fifth year and with fiscal year 1998 appropriations of \$1.7 million, CDC's National Skin Cancer Prevention Education Program includes the following activities:

- Developing a national coalition of federal agencies, professional organizations, voluntary organizations, and the private sector to coordinate national efforts to prevent skin cancer and educate the public about skin cancer prevention.
- Launching a CDC national skin cancer prevention campaign in the early summer of 1998. The first year of this 5-year multimedia campaign will introduce skin protective behaviors and attempt to influence social norms. Each year thereafter, messages will build on and reinforce the previous year's messages. The campaign will feature entertainment programming and broadcast public service announcements (PSAs), as well as print PSAs in a variety of magazines. Media outreach efforts will be designed to mobilize support for the campaign themes and messages.
- Supporting the **American Association for Health Education's** development of the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Coalition for Skin Cancer Prevention Education. The coalition will develop a national action plan for providing skin cancer prevention education to professionals and volunteers who work with youth sports programs, outdoor school activities, parks and recreation programs, and elementary health education. The coalition will also disseminate skin cancer prevention messages and materials nationwide.
- Supporting a state-based coalition for skin cancer prevention education. Coordinated by the **Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland**, this coalition works with children, parents, and child care providers to promote behaviors to prevent skin cancer.
- Supporting **San Diego State University** in developing and implementing an intervention at a zoological park to promote UV protective behaviors

among visitors 12 years old and younger. The intervention will consist of discount coupons for children's hats and sunscreen, educational handouts, visual and oral prompts to encourage the use of shade and other protective strategies, and activities using animal analogies to promote solar protective strategies.

- Supporting the **University of Hawaii and Boston University School of Medicine** in providing sun protection education at swimming sites. The objectives of the project are to increase skills, intentions, and practices for skin cancer prevention among parents, lifeguards, pool managers, and 5- to 10-year-old children at targeted swimming sites and to increase environmental supports and policies for skin cancer prevention.
- Developing epidemiological research and surveillance systems for monitoring program effectiveness and national trends in sun protection behavior and attitudes about exposure to the sun.

Other activities of CDC's National Skin Cancer Prevention Education Program have included

- Collaborating with the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** and the **National Weather Service** to evaluate the UV Index program.
- Working with **EPA** and the **National Association of Physicians for the Environment** to implement skin cancer prevention programs in federal worksites.
- Supporting innovative strategies for skin cancer primary prevention education in five states (**Arizona, California, Georgia, Hawaii, and Massachusetts**). Developed and implemented 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, and dermatologists, these efforts focus on providing sun protection policies and educational programming in recreational, community, and hospital-based settings, including day care centers, soccer leagues, camps, and pools.
- Supporting the development and evaluation of two skin cancer prevention and detection curricula for public health nurses, one a 5-hour continuing education teleconference at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** and the other a 1-week course at the **University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston**.

National Skin Cancer Prevention Guidelines for Schools and Communities

CDC, in partnership with the Prevention Research Center program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, is developing national skin cancer prevention guidelines for schools and communities to address sun protection issues for children in prekindergarten through 12th grade. The document includes guidelines for policy, environment, instruction, professional development, health services, family, community, and evaluation. Accompanying these guidelines are recommendations for developing and implementing them in school and community settings.

Part of a series aimed at improving the health of the nation's children, the guidelines are being developed within CDC's coordinated school health framework. A diverse group representing education, the behavioral sciences, public health, dermatology, oncology, communication, and community and governmental organizations have participated in the development of this document, which is expected to be published in 1998.

**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>**