

Preventing Skin Cancer: The Nation's Most Common Cancer

AT-A-GLANCE
1999



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. A combined total of approximately 1 million new cases of basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas will be detected in 1999, and the American Cancer Society estimates that about 44,200 new cases of malignant melanoma will be diagnosed. In 1999 alone, skin cancer will claim the lives of almost 9,200 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, these carcinomas have a cure rate of more than 95%.

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. Thus, skin cancer is largely preventable when sun protection practices and behaviors 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% 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% sought shade.
- 27% wore hats.
- 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).

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* skin cancer prevention goals. The 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.

With fiscal year 1999 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 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. Beginning in 1999, CDC's state-based Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System will collect information in all states on overexposure to the sun. Individual states may choose to add questions about sun protection behaviors and types of sunburns. Likewise, beginning in 1999, CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System will collect information on sunscreen use among U.S. adolescents.

CDC has just completed a comprehensive, representative national survey of parents to determine behaviors, attitudes, and practices related to sun protection for children aged 6 months to 12 years. Preliminary analyses will be available by summer 1999.

“CDC's 'Choose Your Cover' public service campaign is great! Here in Hawaii, it reminds people that sun protection is a year round habit.”

—Lynn Murakami-Akatsuka, MPH, CHES
Hawaii Department of Health

Getting the Message Out

CDC's national skin cancer prevention campaign, “Choose Your Cover,” was launched in early summer 1998. This



media campaign is designed to change social norms by promoting the acceptability of various skin protective behaviors and the desirability of untanned skin. The campaign features public service announcements that have been disseminated to broadcast and print outlets nationwide. Major TV networks, network affiliates, and cable stations have aired the national campaign spots.

Individual states have extended the reach of the national campaign. Four states—Georgia, Hawaii, Massachusetts, and Missouri—chose to tailor these broadcast public service announcements with their state name and local information. Ten other states—Florida, Illinois, Maine, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Virginia—and Puerto Rico are working with local media to help market the campaign's public service announcements for local placement.



CDC Support for Skin Cancer Prevention Education Initiatives

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

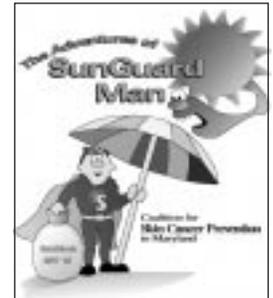
- **Sunwise Stampede**, developed by San Diego State University, is designed to promote sun-safe behaviors among zoological park visitors aged 12 years and younger. The project consists of discount coupons for children's brimmed hats and sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15+ from the zoo 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.



- **Covering the Waterfront**, developed by the University of Hawaii and Boston University School of Medicine, is an intervention provided at public swimming sites to increase awareness, skills, intentions, and practices for skin cancer prevention among parents, lifeguards, pool managers, and children aged 5–10 years. Another project goal is to increase environmental supports and policies aimed at skin cancer prevention, including the use of sunscreen and hats and 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 activities, parks and recreation programs, and elementary and middle-school health education. The coalition has developed a skin cancer prevention Web site 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.
- Maryland's state-based **Coalition for Skin Cancer Prevention** is coordinated by the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland. The target audience for the coalition's skin cancer prevention education efforts are children from birth to age 13 years and their parents and caregivers. The coalition has adopted a logo, Sun Guard Man, for use in education activities. The coalition launched a summer media campaign that included educating Maryland's meteorologists about the importance of the UV index.



“**E**ducating 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

Recently Completed Innovative Initiatives

Five recently completed state-based projects supported by CDC addressed innovative strategies for skin cancer prevention education targeting children and their families. These efforts focused on providing sun protection policies and educational programs in recreational, community, and hospital-based settings.

- **Arizona's** Project SPF (Sun Safety, Protection, and Fun) focused on increasing skin cancer knowledge and awareness of caregivers of children aged 3–5 years. As a result of the project, a Sun Safety Training Curriculum is now offered to day care providers, recreational programs, and camps and incorporated into the regulations for all licensed early childhood centers in the state. The SPF curriculum has also been adopted as an early childhood education course by the state's largest community college system.
- **California** conducted surveys of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices of parents whose children attended a preschool intervention site. Survey results indicated most parents consider skin cancer a significant health issue, but 20% of parents reported taking little action to protect their children from the sun. Interventions included the development of a sun protection teacher's guide, the California Early Childhood Sun Protection Curriculum, and an assessment of shaded areas at pool facilities and ball fields in 71 public parks and 21 schools.
- **Georgia's** Got Youth Covered project demonstrated that an innovative skin cancer prevention program for youth recreational leagues could increase knowledge of sun protection measures among coaches, parents, and young people. Other outcomes included a change in the hours for outdoor activities, such as practice times for team sports, and the use of more awnings and other structures that provide shade during outdoor recreation.
- **Hawaii's** SunSmart project was designed to promote family skin cancer prevention practices in a multiethnic population. Family Fun Guides included stories, games, tip-sheets, puzzles, and sticker activities. SunSmart gifts, including sunscreens, T-shirts, and insulated lunch sacks featuring the SunSmart logo, were offered to those who completed components of the intervention. Significant positive changes in participating sites included improvement in sun protection behaviors among recreation staff, improvements in sunscreen use and sun protection practices for children, and a large increase in sun protection programs and policies.
- **Massachusetts** implemented Falmouth Ban-the-Burn Safe Skin Project in a community on coastal Cape Cod that had the state's highest rates of skin cancer. Sun protection kits were provided for parents of infants and third graders. Community-wide interventions included information booths at baseball games, road races, festivals, band concerts, and health fairs and training sessions for parents, life guards, and recreation department staff and coaches. The education project for new mothers has since been institutionalized in the community hospital. As a result of school-based and communitywide awareness activities, parents reported having an increased perception of risk and greater motivation to use sun protection measures.

“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 (1993–1998)

Building Critical Partnerships

CDC has convened the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention to facilitate national skin cancer awareness and prevention efforts through education and promotion of sun-safe behaviors.

The Council has established the following objectives:

- To increase skin cancer awareness and prevention behaviors in all populations, with special emphasis on high-risk populations, including children, young adults, parents, educators, outdoor workers, and athletes.
- 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; this response should include sharing research findings, planning joint programs and conferences, and targeting audience-specific initiatives.
- To develop a national skin cancer prevention and education plan to address the continuum of existing activities and to identify groups in all areas of skin cancer prevention efforts.

CDC has also convened a Federal Council on Skin Cancer Prevention to facilitate skin cancer awareness and prevention efforts through education and promotion of sun-safe behaviors among federal agency employees, their families, and agency constituents. Participating organizations include but are not limited to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Defense, the Department of Education, the Food and Drug Administration, and the National Cancer Institute. Council members will assist in meeting national public health skin

cancer prevention objectives by supporting complementary education efforts and coordinating information exchange.

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
Association of State and Territorial Chronic
Disease Program Directors
Association of State and Territorial Directors of
Health Promotion and Public Health Education
CDC Foundation
National Association of Physicians for the
Environment
National Cancer Institute
National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal
and Skin Diseases
National Medical Association
Skin Cancer Foundation
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

**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,
Telephone (770) 488-4751; Fax (770) 488-4760.
cancerinfo@cdc.gov
<http://www.cdc.gov/cancer>**