



## Here Comes the Sun: Protect your family from its rays this summer

About 1.3 million new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the United States each year, according to the National Safety Council. American Cancer Society statistics show that in 2001, skin cancer claimed the lives of nearly 9,800 people.

"The fact that we're experiencing a skin cancer epidemic means more work needs to be done [about sun safety education]," said Phil Schneider, executive director of the Sun Safety Alliance, Alexandria, VA. "Children and families should continue to enjoy the outdoors, but need to learn to protect themselves."

### Warning: Keep Kids Covered

Children are the most at risk for overexposure to ultraviolet radiation. Yet many children either spend time out in the sun without sunscreen or are underprotected. "Children require special attention because they are outdoors so often during the summertime," said Eric Miller, manager of communications for the American Cancer Society in Atlanta. "Kids sometimes think it's not cool to wear sunscreen, but 60 to 80 percent of sun exposure occurs before the age of 18."

### Tan at Your Own Risk

Melanoma is linked to tanning, exposure to the sun and sunburns before the age of 20. Tanning booths and sunlamps are not a safe alternative to natural sun – they use UV rays that can cause damage. According to Miller, it's a popular misconception that tanning beds are safer than tanning in direct sunlight.

Even if you don't purposely try to get a suntan, you may still be at risk for skin cancer. If you have fair skin, a family history of skin cancer, or multiple atypical moles you are at risk.

Fortunately, skin cancer can be found early, and both doctors and patients play an important role in identifying it. Keep watch for symptoms of skin cancer such as changes on the skin; scaliness; oozing, bleeding or change in the appearance of a bump or nodule; spread of pigmentation beyond its border; or a change in sensation.

### You've Got it Made in the Shade

The best way to lower the risk of skin cancer is to avoid intense sunlight for long periods of time and to practice sun safety. You can continue to exercise and enjoy the outdoors by taking a few easy precautions from the American Cancer Society and other sun-safety organizations.

- Avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Look for shade, especially in the middle of the day when the sun's rays are strongest.
- Cover up with protective clothing to guard as much skin as possible when you are out in the sun.
- Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor of 30 or higher. It is best to purchase sunscreens with broad-spectrum protection, protecting against both UVA and UVB rays. Apply a generous amount and reapply after swimming, toweling dry or perspiring.
- Cover your head with a wide-brimmed hat, shading your ears, face and neck.
- Follow these practices to protect your skin even on cloudy days – UV rays travel through clouds.

### Don't Close Your Eyes to the Danger

The sun doesn't only cause damage to the skin. The National Safety Council cites results from dozens of studies suggesting spending long hours in the sun without eye protection increases the chances of developing eye diseases, including cataracts. M. Bowes Hamill of the American Academy of



Ophthalmology in Washington said other eye diseases caused by overexposure to the sun include maculopathy, early stage macular degeneration, and pterygium – a fleshy growth of conjunctiva on the cornea.

“Everyone should take care to wear UV-filtering sunglasses, or if you wear eyeglasses all the time, have a UV filter put in your daily-wear glasses,” Hamill said.

### **Don't Lower Your Resistance**

Need yet another reason to avoid sunburns? Scientists believe sunburns can alter the distribution and function of disease-fighting white blood cells in humans for up to 24 hours after exposure to the sun. Repeated exposure to UV radiation can cause more damage to the body's immune system. One mild sunburn can directly suppress the immune functions of human skin, even in people with dark skin.

*Copyright 2006 \* National Safety Council \* All Rights Reserved.*