

## PARENTS! PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM TOO MUCH SUNLIGHT

Parents, did you know that **childhood sunburns** could increase your child's risk of developing skin cancer as an adult? Even a **suntan** is harmful. Tanning is actually an outward sign of internal skin damage.

Sunlight is believed to cause 80 to 90 percent of all skin cancer. The number of skin cancer cases has dramatically risen, especially in the last two to three decades because of:

- Increased outdoor leisure time (and thus contact with sunlight).
- Decrease in the amount (coverage) of clothing worn.
- Decreasing amounts of atmospheric ozone that partially protects the earth's surface from receiving cancer producing ultraviolet (**UV**) rays, principally from the sun.

The three major forms of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma (**BCC**), squamous cell carcinoma (**SCC**), and the deadliest form - malignant melanoma. Skin cancer can develop anywhere on the body but most often appears on surfaces receiving the most sunlight.

**Malignant melanoma** is the most serious form of skin cancer. It often arises from or near a mole. You should see your doctor (especially a dermatologist) if you have a mole or growth that has any one of these features:

- If divided in half, the two resulting parts would not have the same shape.
- It has jagged or rough edges.
- It has two or more colors (which may be mixed together).
- It is wider than a standard pencil eraser.

Melanoma does not necessarily appear on parts of the body not exposed to sunlight. While light-skinned people have a greater risk of getting melanoma, this disease is growing among people of color.

In the United States, over 900,000 to 1,000,000 people are expected to get BCC or SCC this year. An additional

40,000 will develop melanoma. An estimated 7,000 to 8,000 individuals will die from melanoma.

Since sunlight is the major cause of skin cancer, parents should protect children from too much sunlight. That's because up to 80 percent of a person's lifetime exposure to sunlight occurs during childhood and adolescence.

Any person, regardless of skin color, can get skin cancer. Individuals most likely to get skin cancer will tend to have some of these characteristics:

- Fair skin
- Blue, green, or hazel eyes
- Light-colored hair (non-black)
- Freckles
- History of severe sunburns
- Tendency to burn rather than tan
- Have many moles (especially over 50 to 100)
- Personal or family history of skin cancer

UV rays linked to skin cancer development are more intense (destructive) under certain time frames or conditions:

- 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Lack of cloud cover
- Mid-spring through mid-fall
- Higher altitudes (mountains)

### Sun Safety Tips

- Wear tightly woven, loose fitting clothing that covers as much of the body as possible.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat (at least 4-inch brim) that produces a shadow that covers the eyes, ears, nose, face, and back of the neck.
- Reduce sun exposure from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when UV rays are strongest. (This is especially important from mid-spring through mid-fall.)
- Find shade (trees, physical structures) to shield you, especially from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. **Shade Tip:** Parents, at home you should move play equipment

like swing sets and other fixed recreation items in your yard to places covered by shade.

- Use sunglasses that include a warranty stating that they provide at least 95 percent UVA and UVB (broad-spectrum) protection.
- Liberally apply sunscreen to exposed skin one-half hour before going outdoors. The sunscreen container should have a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of 15 or above and should state that it has broad-spectrum (UVA and UVB) protection. PABA-free sunscreens are recommended for persons with sensitive skin. Depending on outdoor conditions, sunscreen should be reapplied at least every two hours.

## **Warning!**

Don't depend on sunscreen alone to protect children and adults from skin cancer. Instead, rely as much as possible on a combination of all the tips listed above.

Finally, the good news is that most skin cancer can be successfully treated if detected in its earlier stages. Of course the best "treatment," as always, is **PREVENTION**. Your child care site is or will teach your child how to protect him or herself from too much sunlight. Your support and cooperation is vital to help your young ones live sun-safe.

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Source:

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