

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



July 2006

UV Exposure — Protect Yourself



Ultraviolet radiation (UV) is one of the greatest threats to our eyes and skin. This invisible threat can damage our eyes leading to vision loss and long term skin damage. July is UV Awareness Month and we are reminded of the importance of protecting our eyes and skin from the sun's harmful rays by wearing sunglasses, wide-brimmed hats and sunscreens.

As scientific evidence continues to pile up, everyone, including children, is at risk of long-term exposure to ultraviolet radiation that can lead to damage of our eyes and skin. Studies have shown that exposure to bright sunlight may increase the risk of developing cataracts, sunburn and long term skin damage. The more exposure to bright light increases the chance of developing these and other eye and skin conditions. Skin and eyes never recover from UV exposure.

Granted, this kind of damage is caused by a lifetime of exposure to bright sun; however, you need to protect your eyes and skin from acute damage caused by outings on very bright days. Living as we do in higher altitudes, the risk of UV exposure is increased.

Although July is designated as UV Safety Month, sun damage to eyes and skin can occur anytime during the year, not just in the summer-time.

Take steps to protect yourself:

Avoid Sunburn

The best way to prevent a sunburn is to avoid sun exposure.

Find shade if you need to be outdoors. You can also calculate how much ultraviolet (UV) exposure you are getting by using the shadow rule: A shadow that is longer than you are means UV exposure is low; a shadow that is shorter than you are means the UV exposure is high.

Other ways to protect yourself from the sun include wearing protective clothing, such as:

- Hats with wide 4 inch brims that cover your neck, ears, eyes, and scalp.
- Most sunburn can be prevented

by using a sunscreen with an (SPF) sun protection factor of 15.

- Loose-fitting, tightly woven clothing that covers your arms and legs.
- Stay out of the midday sun (from 10 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon), which is the strongest sunlight.
- You should start protecting your child from the sun when he or she is a baby.
- Keep babies younger than 6 months of age out of the sun. If sunscreen is needed, use a sunscreen with a (SPF) of 30 or higher to protect babies' and children's very sensitive skin. A small amount on the face or the back of the hands is not harmful.

Source: WebMD at www.WebMD.com

Sunblock For The Eyes

- Select sunglasses that block ultraviolet rays. Some labels read "UV protection up to



Sources: WebMD at www.webmd.com

UV Exposure - Protect Yourself (Continued)

400nm” – this means 100 percent UV absorption. Be careful of purchasing sunglasses that state they “block UV” without saying how much, they need to block 99 to 100 percent of UV rays. The ability to block UV light is not dependent on the darkness of the lens or the price tag.

- Ideally, your sunglasses should wrap all the way around to your temples, so the sun’s rays can’t enter from the side.
- It is recommended to wear in addition to sunglasses, a broad-rimmed hat to protect your eyes. Even on a cloudy day, the sun’s rays can pass through the



haze and thin clouds.

- Reduce your risk of exposure, even if you wear contacts, with UV protection by wearing sunglasses.
- Early afternoon and in higher altitudes, where UV light is more intense, makes it especially important to wear sunglasses.

Source: American Academy of Ophthalmology



UV Exposure - Risk Factors

Any factor that increases your exposure to sunlight, increases your risk of eye and skin damage.

These factors include:

- **Environment:** UV exposure is greater on the snow, sand and pavement, as well as on the water.
- **Altitude:** UV radiation levels rise in high altitudes (in the mountains).
- **Latitude:** UV radiation is higher at low latitudes (near the equator).
- **Weather:** UV radiation permeates through overcast conditions, such as haze and clouds.
- **Length of Time Outdoors:** the longer you spend in the sun, the more UV radiation you receive.
- **Eye and Skin Color:** People with light colored eyes and skin are at greater risk.
- **Time of Day:** UV radiation is highest between 10am and 4pm.
- **Season:** UV radiation is most intense in the spring and summer, low in the fall and least intense in the winter.
- **Medication:** Photosensitizing medication, such as tetracycline, doxycycline, allopurinol, phenothiazine and psoralens increases your skin and eye sensitivity to light.

A photograph of a woman in a red blazer presenting at a meeting. She is holding a document. In the background, there is a screen displaying "CHP Educational Training Round 2" and a bar chart. The text "CHP Educational Training Round 2" is overlaid on the image.

**CHP Educational Training
Round 2**

Training starts in July - check with your county contact for dates and times or go to www.ctsi.org

Don't miss out on this free educational meeting.