

# Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



June, 2008

## Getting Too Much Sun Can Be Dangerous

**M**any people love the warm sun. The sun's rays make us feel good, and in the short term, make us look good. But our love affair isn't a two way street: Exposure to sun causes most of the wrinkles and age spots on our faces and is the number one cause of skin cancer.

In fact, sun exposure causes most of the skin changes that we think of as a normal part of aging. Over time, the sun's ultraviolet (UV) light damages the fibers in the skin called elastin. When these fibers breakdown, the skin begins to sag, stretch, and lose its ability to go back into place after stretching. The skin also bruises and tears more easily -- taking longer to heal. So while sun damage to the skin may not be apparent when you're young, it will definitely show later in life.



### The Facts About Getting Too Much Sun

It's a fact: Overexposure to the sun can result in skin cancer later in life. What are your family's risks from exposure to powerful UV rays? Consider these facts and statistics.

#### The Dangers of UV Exposure

- You can sunburn even on a cloudy day.
- On average, children get 3 times more exposure than adults.
- Concrete, sand, water, and snow reflect 85% to 90% of the sun's UV rays.
- Depletion of Earth's ozone continues to increase your exposure to UV rays.
- In some parts of the world,

melanoma is increasing at rates faster than any other cancer.

- More than 1.2 million new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed each year in the US.
- Melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, kills one person every hour.
- One blistering sunburn can double a child's lifetime risk of developing skin cancer.

### UV Rays - Invisible and Dangerous

UV, or ultraviolet, rays are the sun's "invisible" burning rays. They can cause sunburns, and in some cases skin cancer.

There are three types of UV rays:

**UVA:** Are more constant year-round and penetrate deeper into the



(Over)

## Getting To Much Sun. . . (Continued)

skin's layers; UVA rays are also harmful and contribute to burning, premature aging of the skin, and the development of certain forms of skin cancer.

**UVB:** Are the primary cause of sun burning, premature aging of the skin and the development of skin cancer.

**UVC:** Are blocked by the ozone layer and do not reach the earth's surface.

### Sun Safety Tips

- Keep in mind the sun is strongest between 10 am and 2 pm.
- Always wear protective clothing when outside and wear clothing that's dark and tightly woven.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.
- Remember that UV rays bounce off sand, snow, concrete, and water.
- Do not use sun tanning beds.
- Keep very young children (6 months or less) out of the sun.
- Sunscreens need to be applied liberally and evenly over all exposed areas.
- To achieve adequate UV protection you should use products that provide broad spectrum protection, which means protection against both UVB and UVA rays. For broad spectrum protection, look for products that provide an SPF of at least 15 and contain ingredients like Avobenzone

## Are You at Risk for Skin Cancer?

People of all races can burn—no matter who you are or where you live. It makes no difference whether you're Irish, African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American—or whatever! Some people, however, may be at higher risk than others. Having one or more of the following risk factors could increase your risk for developing skin cancer.

- Spending a great deal of time in the sun, especially during childhood
- Having fair skin that easily burns or freckles
- Having had severe burns from the sun, tanning beds or lamps, x-rays or radiation
- Living in the Sun Belt or at higher elevations
- Having a family history of certain types of skin cancer
- Having an immune system weakened for any reason
- Appearance of moles

(Parsol 1789) or zinc oxide.

- For children, the SSA recommends sunscreen with an SPF 30 or higher.
- Apply sunscreen before going outdoors and reapply often.
- Reapply sunscreen after swimming, perspiring, and toweling off.

- Provide complete sunscreen coverage for your skin (including neck, ears and lips!).
- For people with thin or thinning hair, apply sunscreen to the scalp as well.
- And remember, stay in the shade whenever possible!

Source: [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

