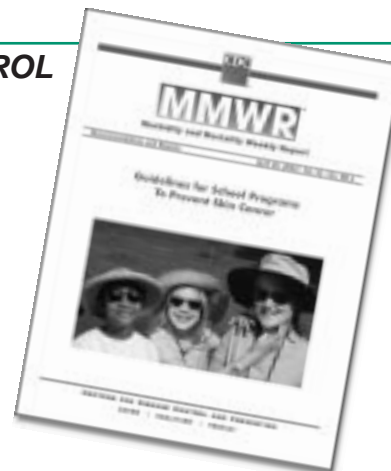


Skin Cancer: Preventing America's Most Common Cancer



The Burden of Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. More than 1 million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in 2002. The three major types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. Although basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas can be cured if detected and treated early, these cancers can cause considerable damage and disfigurement. Melanoma is the deadliest form of skin cancer, causing more than 75%

of all skin cancer deaths. About 53,600 people in the United States will be diagnosed with a melanoma skin cancer in 2002, and approximately 7,400 will die.

Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays appears to be the most important environmental factor in the development of skin cancer. Skin cancer can be prevented when sun-protective practices are used consistently. UV rays from artificial sources of light, such as tanning beds

and sun lamps, are just as dangerous as those from the sun, and should also be avoided. Although both tanning and burning can increase a person's risk for skin cancer, most Americans do not consistently protect themselves from UV rays. A recent survey sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that approximately 43% of white children under age 12 experienced at least one sunburn during the past year.

CDC's National Leadership

CDC's skin cancer prevention and education efforts are designed to reduce illness and death. To help achieve this goal, CDC supports a variety of activities.

Education and Recommendations

To disseminate information about the importance of minimizing UV exposure during childhood, the CDC published the *Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer* in 2002 to help state and local education agencies and schools play a role in reducing unsafe sun exposure.

Recommendations include

- Establishing policies that reduce exposure to UV radiation.
- Providing an environment that supports sun-safety practices.
- Providing health education to teach students the knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral skills needed to prevent skin cancer.
- Involving family members in skin cancer prevention efforts.
- Training health care professionals on skin cancer prevention.
- Complementing and supporting skin cancer prevention with school health services.
- Evaluating periodically whether schools are implementing these guidelines.

Who Is at Risk?

Although anyone can get skin cancer, some people are at particular risk. Risk factors include

- Light skin color, hair color, eye color.
- Family history of skin cancer.
- Personal history of skin cancer.
- Chronic exposure to the sun.
- History of sunburns early in life.
- Certain types and a large number of moles.
- Freckles, which indicate sun sensitivity and sun damage.



The guidelines are available on the Web at http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_rr.html. Additional information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer> and <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash>.

CDC and other federal agencies are also working with the independent Task Force on Community Preventive Services to review studies of community-based interventions to prevent skin cancer. Recommended interventions will be published in the *Guide to Community Preventive Services*. This guide provides a scientific base of proven interventions that communities can use as they plan and implement programs to prevent skin cancer.

Working with Schools

- In April 1998, CDC convened the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention under the auspices of CDC's National Skin Cancer Prevention Education Program (NSCPEP). NSCPEP is a multidimensional program that uses a research-based approach to preventing skin cancer by targeting parents and caregivers, particularly those with young children. Activities include epidemiological research and surveillance, a multimedia health communications campaign, and support for coalitions and intervention demonstration projects. More information is available at <http://www.skincancerprevention.org>.
- During January 2002, CDC and the American Cancer Society (ACS) sponsored "From Guidelines to Action: Skin Cancer Prevention in Schools," a forum that included national, state, and local leaders in education, public health, and skin cancer prevention. During the forum, participants suggested strategies and tools for implementing recommendations from the *Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer* in U.S. schools systems. CDC and ACS are now developing such tools including templates for informational flyers, presentations, curriculum supplements, and newsletters that will help schools assess their readiness to implement skin cancer prevention activities and policies.
- In April 2002, CDC released the EXCITE Skin Cancer Module, which can be used by high school students and teachers to learn more about skin cancer and epidemiology. EXCITE is a collection of teaching materials developed by CDC to introduce students to public health and epidemiology. More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/excite>.

Collecting Data

CDC supports the collection of information on sun-protection behaviors and is developing monitoring systems to determine national trends in sun-exposure behaviors and attitudes. These findings will be used to better target and evaluate future skin cancer prevention efforts. During 2003, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and the National Health Interview Survey will include questions about sun protection behaviors.

Building Partnerships

The National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention is an alliance working to: (1) increase skin cancer awareness and prevention behaviors in all populations, particularly those at high risk; (2) develop and support partnerships to extend and reinforce core messages for behavioral change; (3) coordinate national efforts to reduce skin cancer incidence and deaths; and (4) develop a national skin cancer prevention and education plan. CDC is an active member of the Council, as well as a member of the Federal Council on Skin Cancer Prevention, which promotes sun-protection behaviors among federal employees, their families, and agency constituents.

Promoting Prevention Messages

CDC launched the fifth year of its **Choose Your Cover** skin cancer public education campaign during Memorial Day weekend 2002, the unofficial start of summer. The campaign urges teens and young adults to protect their skin from the sun's harmful UV rays during outdoor activities. Campaign messages are delivered through radio and television public service announcements that are geared to teens and young adults—two groups that spend hours in the sun and are among the least likely to protect themselves. The campaign emphasizes that young people can protect their skin while still having fun outdoors. For more information on additional preventive measures, visit the **Choose Your Cover** Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/chooseyourcover>.

State Skin Cancer Activities

CDC has funded several state skin cancer projects that are establishing broad-based coalitions, coordinating surveillance systems, and developing and disseminating public and provider education programs. Additional skin cancer control funding will be awarded to several states in 2002 to implement skin cancer prevention activities identified and prioritized in the states' cancer control plans.

For more information or additional copies of this document, please contact:

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