



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Follow skin protection guidelines to prevent skin cancer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Each year at least 54,000 people are expected to be diagnosed with malignant skin cancer in the United States, including over 900 people in Alabama. Nationally, at least 9,800 will die from the disease.

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer and the cause of skin cancer deaths. A painful, blistering sunburn received as a child or adolescent is a contributor to the risk of developing a melanoma. Once developed, it can spread quickly throughout the body. The two most common types of skin cancer, basal and squamous cell carcinomas, can be painful and disfiguring if not properly treated but are not usually life threatening. When found in an early stage, skin cancer can be 100 percent curable.

During May, National Skin Cancer Prevention Month, the Alabama Department of Public Health encourages everyone to protect their skin from the sun and the harmful ultraviolet rays of the sun. The Cancer Prevention Division of the Health Department is partnering with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and Healthy Child Care Program of Alabama in a project that teaches young children and their caregivers how to prevent skin cancer. The Sun Safe Kids project consists of a curriculum that uses activity booklets and video to teach children about sun protection and how to play it safe in the sun.

According to the American Cancer Society 80 percent of sun exposure occurs before adulthood. By teaching children at an early age to protect themselves the number of skin cancers will be effectively reduced. The Sun Safe Project is being introduced this spring across the state in day care centers and Head Starts.

Practicing skin self-examination on a regular basis is the best way to find skin changes early. See a health care professional about any changes on the skin such as the size or color of a mole or other dark spot; scaliness, oozing, bleeding, or change in the look of a bump or a change in feeling, itchiness, tenderness or pain.

Risk factors that may increase the chances of getting some form of skin cancer include overexposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun or tanning lamps; family history of skin cancer; and working around coal, tar, pitch, creosote, arsenic compounds or radium.

Jora Thomas, health educator with the Cancer Prevention Division says, "We do not want to discourage children from playing outside, but we do encourage protecting them when they are in the sun. Too much of anything is not good for any of us."

To decrease the risk of getting skin cancer follow these sun safety tips:

- Wear tightly woven, loose-fitting clothing that covers as much of the body as possible.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat that produces a shadow that covers the eyes, ears, nose, face, and back of the neck.
- Use sunglasses that include a warranty stating that they provide at least 95 percent UVA and UVB (broad-spectrum) protection. Sunglasses without both UVA and UVB protection can be dangerous because they allow pupils to dilate because of the shade, but do not block harmful rays.
- Reduce sun exposure from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when UV rays are strongest.
- Liberally apply sunscreen to exposed skin 30 minutes 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 re-applied at least every two hours.

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