



# Sun Safety on Campus

COLLEGES AGAINST CANCER AND COLLEGIATE MISSION TOOLKIT

Most of the more than one million cases of non-melanoma skin cancer diagnosed yearly in the United States are considered to be sun related. Melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, will account for an estimated 62,480 cases of skin cancer in 2008 and most (about 8,420) of the 11,200 deaths that will occur due to skin cancer this year.

## Melanoma in the United States 2008 Estimates

New Cases: 62,480

Deaths Per Year: 8,420

5-Year Localized Survival Rate\*: 99%

5-Year Overall Survival Rate\*: 91%

\* The 5-year survival rates represent persons who are living 5 years after diagnosis, whether disease free, in remission, or under treatment. They do not imply that 5-year survivors have been permanently cured of cancer. Localized cancer represents cancer that, at the time of diagnosis, had not spread to additional sites within the body. Typically, the earlier a cancer is detected and diagnosed, the more successful the treatment, thus enhancing the survival rate.

## What are the risk factors for skin cancer?

Risk factors for non-melanoma and melanoma skin cancers include:

- Unprotected and/or excessive exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation
- Fair complexion
- Family history of skin cancer, especially melanoma
- Multiple or atypical moles
- Severe sunburns as a child
- Personal history of melanoma
- Occupational exposures to coal tar, pitch, creosote, arsenic compounds, or radium
- Older age
- Radiation exposure

## What are the signs and symptoms of skin cancer?

Skin cancer can be found early, and both doctors and patients play an important role in finding skin cancer. If you have any of the following symptoms, tell your doctor.

- Any change on the skin, especially in the size or color of a mole or other darkly pigmented growth or spot, or a new growth
- Scaliness, oozing, bleeding, or a change in the appearance of a bump or nodule
- The spread of pigmentation beyond the border of a spot on the skin, such as dark coloring that spreads past the edge of a mole or mark
- A change in sensation, itchiness, tenderness, or pain

## How do I protect myself from UV rays?

It isn't possible or practical to completely avoid sunlight, and it would be unwise to reduce your level of activity to avoid the outdoors. Time in sunlight also helps your body make vitamin D, which can be important for good health. But too much sunlight can be harmful. There are some steps you can take to limit your amount of exposure to UV rays.

Some people think about sun protection only when they spend a day at the lake, beach, or pool. But sun exposure adds up day after day, and it happens every time you are in the sun. "Slip! Slop! Slap! and Wrap!" is a catch phrase that reminds people of the four key methods they can use to protect themselves from UV radiation. Slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen, and slap on a hat to protect your skin, then wrap on sunglasses to protect the eyes and the sensitive skin around them from ultraviolet light.

Following these practical steps can help protect you from the effects of the sun. These steps complement each other; they provide the best protection when used together.



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Cancer<sup>SM</sup>



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### 1. Cover up.

When you are out in the sun, wear clothing to protect as much skin as possible. Clothes provide different levels of protection, depending on many factors. Long-sleeved shirts, long pants, or long skirts cover the most skin and are the most protective. Dark colors generally provide more protection than light colors. A tightly woven fabric protects better than loosely woven clothing. Dry fabric is generally more protective than wet fabric.

If you can see light through a fabric, UV rays can get through, too. Be aware that covering up doesn't block out all UV rays. A typical light T-shirt worn in the summer usually protects you less than sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.

The ideal sun-protective fabrics are lightweight, comfortable, and protect against exposure even when wet. A few companies in the United States now make sun-protective clothing. They tend to be more tightly woven, and some have special coatings to help absorb UV rays. Some sun-protective clothes have a label listing the ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) value – the level of protection the garment provides from the sun's UV rays (on a scale from 15 to 50+). The higher the UPF, the better the protection from UV rays.

Newer products are now available to increase the UPF value of clothes you already own. Used like laundry detergents, they add a layer of UV protection to your clothes without changing the color or texture.

### 2. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.

A sunscreen is a product that you apply to your skin for some protection against the sun's UV rays, although it does not provide total protection. Sunscreens are available in many forms – lotions, creams, ointments, gels, wipes, and lip balms, to name a few.

Some cosmetics, such as lipsticks and foundations, also are considered sunscreen products if they contain sunscreen. Some makeup contains sunscreen, but only the label can tell you if it does. Makeup, including lipstick, without sunscreen does not provide sun protection. Check the labels to find out.

**When selecting a sunscreen product, be sure to read the label before you buy.** Experts recommend products with

an SPF of at least 15. The SPF number represents the level of protection against UVB rays provided by the sunscreen – a higher number means more protection.

It is important to remember that sunscreen does not give you total protection. When using an SPF 15 and applying it correctly, you get the equivalent of one minute of UVB rays for each 15 minutes you spend in the sun. So, one hour in the sun wearing SPF 15 sunscreen is the same as spending four minutes totally unprotected.

The SPF number indicates protection against UVB rays only. Sunscreen products labeled “broad-spectrum” protect against UVA and UVB radiation, but at this time there is no standard system for measuring protection from UVA rays. Products with an SPF of 15 or higher that also contain avobenzone (Parsol 1789), ecamsule, zinc oxide, or titanium dioxide are likely to be effective against UVB and most UVA rays.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which regulates sunscreens in the United States, has proposed a new set of rules for sunscreen labels. Part of this includes a rating system for UVA protection. Under the new system, sunscreens would be rated from one to four stars, with one star being a low level of UVA protection and four stars being the highest. It is not yet clear when this new rule might go into effect.

Also check for an expiration date on the sunscreen container to be sure it is still effective. Most sunscreen products are no longer as effective after two to three years.

Some sunscreen products can irritate skin. Many products claim to be “hypoallergenic” or “dermatologist tested,” but the only way to know for sure whether a product will irritate your skin is to apply a small amount for three days. If your skin does not turn red or become tender and itchy, the product should be okay for you.

**Be sure to apply the sunscreen properly.** Always follow the label directions. Most recommend applying sunscreen generously to dry skin 20 to 30 minutes before going outside so your skin has time to absorb the chemicals. When applying it, pay close attention to your face, ears, hands, and arms, and generously coat the skin that is not covered by clothing. If you're going to wear insect repellent or makeup, apply the sunscreen first. For high-glare situations, a higher SPF sunscreen or zinc oxide may be used on your nose and lips.



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**Be generous.** About one ounce of sunscreen (a “palmful”) should be used to cover the arms, legs, neck, and face of the average adult. For best results, most sunscreens must be reapplied at least every two hours and even more often if you are swimming or sweating. Products labeled “waterproof” may provide protection for at least 80 minutes even when you are swimming or sweating. Products that are “water resistant” may provide protection for only 40 minutes. Remember that sunscreen usually rubs off when you towel yourself dry, so you will need to reapply.

Sunless tanning products, such as bronzers and extenders, give skin a golden color, but unlike sunscreens, these products provide very little protection from UV damage.

### 3. Wear a hat.

A hat with at least a 2- to 3-inch brim all around is ideal because it protects areas often exposed to the sun, such as the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp. A shade cap (which looks like a baseball cap with about 7 inches of fabric draping down the sides and back) also is good. These are often sold in sports and outdoor supply stores.

A baseball cap can protect the front and top of the head but not the back of the neck or the ears, where skin cancers commonly develop. Straw hats are not recommended unless they are tightly woven.

### 4. Wear sunglasses that block UV rays.

Research has shown that spending long hours in the sun without protecting your eyes increases your chances of developing eye disease. UV-blocking sunglasses can help protect your eyes from sun damage.

The ideal sunglasses do not have to be expensive, but they should block 99 percent to 100 percent of UVA and UVB radiation. Check the label to be sure they do. Some labels may say “UV absorption up to 400 nm.” This is the same as 100 percent UV absorption. Also, labels that say “Meets American National Standards Institute ANSI UV Requirements” mean the glasses block at least 99 percent of UV rays. Those labeled “cosmetic” block about 70 percent of the UV rays. If there is no label, don’t assume the sunglasses provide any protection.

Keep in mind that darker glasses are not necessarily better because UV protection comes from an invisible chemical applied to the lenses, not from the color or darkness of the

lenses. Look for an ANSI label. However, large-framed and wraparound sunglasses are more likely to protect your eyes from light coming in from different angles.

### 5. Limit direct sun exposure during midday.

Another way to limit exposure to UV light is to avoid being outdoors in the sunlight for too long when the sun is most intense. UV rays are most intense during the middle of the day, usually between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. If you are unsure about the sun’s intensity, take the shadow test: If your shadow is shorter than you, the sun’s rays are the strongest. Plan activities out of the sun during these times. If you must be outdoors, protect your skin.

#### Information about UV Rays:

UV rays reach the ground throughout the year, even on cloudy days. UV rays can also pass through water, so don’t think you’re safe if you’re in the water and feeling cool. Be especially careful on the beach and in the snow because sand and snow reflect sunlight, increasing the amount of UV radiation you receive.

Some UV rays can also pass through windows. Typical car, home, and office windows block most of the UVB rays but a smaller portion of UVA rays, so even if you don’t feel you’re getting burned, your skin may still get some long-term damage. Tinted windows help block more UVA rays, although this depends on the type of tinting. UV radiation that comes through windows probably doesn’t pose a great risk to most people unless they spend extended periods of time close to a window that receives direct sunlight.

If you plan to be outdoors, you may want to check the UV Index for your area. The UV Index usually can be found in the local newspaper or on TV and radio news broadcasts. It is also available on the US Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Web site at [www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html).

### 6. Avoid tanning beds and sunlamps.

Many people believe the UV rays of tanning beds are harmless. This is not true. Tanning lamps give out UVA and frequently UVB rays as well. Both UVA and UVB rays can cause serious long-term skin damage, and both contribute to skin cancer. Because of these dangers, many health experts advise people to avoid sunlamps and tanning beds.



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### 7. Examine your skin, and get your skin checked by your doctor.

As part of a routine cancer-related checkup, your doctor should check your skin carefully. He or she should be willing to discuss any concerns you might have about this exam.

#### How to Check Your Own Skin:

It's important to check your own skin, preferably once a month. A self-exam is best done in a well-lit room in front of a full-length mirror. You can use a hand-held mirror for areas that are hard to see. Ask someone to help you with these exams, especially for those hard-to-see areas, such as the lower back or the back of your thighs.

The first time you inspect your skin, spend a fair amount of time carefully going over the entire surface of your skin. Learn the pattern of moles, blemishes, freckles, and other marks on your skin so that you'll notice any changes next time. Any trouble spots should be seen by a doctor.

### Activity Ideas from our Colleges Against Cancer Chapters

So, how can you share sun safety information on campus? Here are some ideas for creating awareness:

- Pass out “citations” to people not wearing sunscreen.
- Host a table in a visible spot on campus, and pass out sunscreen packets and skin cancer quizzes. Ask those hosting the table to wear winter gear, including goggles, to remind people that you should wear sunscreen year-round.
- Host a table in a visible spot on campus and give manicures with UV-sensitive nail polish.
- Set up shot glasses filled with sunscreen as examples of how much you should use each time you apply.
- Ask your Colleges Against Cancer committee or chapter members to carry black umbrellas with sun safety messages on them on campus for a day.
- Hand out caps and sunscreen for outdoor sports events.
- Host a sunscreen “slip and slide” (make sure to provide goggles) in the quad.
- Hold a barbecue under tents and ask people to apply sunscreen as admission.
- Ask the swim team to stand in a central spot on campus wearing swimsuits and have them give out sunscreen.
- Ask your committee to do a product review of self-tanning products.
- Work with a spray tan business that *doesn't have tanning beds* to offer discounts.

Some taglines for your activities:

- Smart girls fake it. Use self tanner!
- Have fun in the sun, but cover your bun.

Visit [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).