



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Idaho Public Health Districts

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SKIN CANCER IN IDAHO: DYING FOR A TAN

Skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in the US, affecting nearly 1 million Americans every year.¹ About 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime.¹ Rates of melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer, have been increasing nationwide. In fact, for people born in 2005, 1 in 55 will be diagnosed with melanoma – nearly 30 times the rate for people born in 1930.¹ Unfortunately, Idaho residents are not immune to this deadly disease; rates in Idaho are among the highest in the US. Idaho has the third highest melanoma death rate among men and women combined. More alarming is the fact that women in Idaho had the highest melanoma death rate in the nation.²

According to the 2012 Idaho Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, about 30% of Idaho adults reported at least one sunburn in the past year. With each sunburn, the risk of developing melanoma increases. The sooner sun safety habits are adopted, the more likely skin cancer can be prevented. For that reason, Idaho's Public Health Districts are working diligently to stress the importance of sun safety at a young age.

By partnering with hospitals and other birthing centers, the Public Health Districts are able to provide sun safety education to new parents through the *No Sun for Baby* program. Parents are taught the importance of keeping their babies in the shade, covering their skin with clothing, and avoiding the use of sunscreen until the age of six months.

Some young children are under the supervision of childcare providers during peak sun hours (10:00 am to 4:00 pm). The *Team Sun Safety* program, implemented by Idaho's Public Health Districts, is meant to increase the practice of sun safety in schools and childcare centers. Public Health works with providers to enact sun safety policies, create sun safe environments, encourage the use of sun protective clothing and sunscreen, and educates administration, staff, and parents on the importance of sun safety.

When Coco Chanel, the famous fashion designer, returned from a vacation with a tan in the 1920's, the tanning revolution began. Since then, it's been difficult to change the public's positive perception of tanned skin. Educating tweens and teens about the dangers of tanning is a priority for Public Health. Over the last 20 years, the number of teens and young adults reporting use of tanning beds increased from 1% to 27%.³ This is distressing because indoor tanning use before the age of 35 increases melanoma risk by 75%.³

Fortunately, you can continue to work, exercise and enjoy the outdoors while practicing sun safety at the same time. Here are some ways to do this:

- Practice the shadow rule – if your shadow is shorter than you, seek shade, especially during midday hours.
- Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses with 99-100% UVA/UVB protection.
- Apply a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher at least 20 minutes before going outside. Re-apply every two hours and use it on cloudy days and all year round.
- Avoid sun tanning and tanning beds. Ultra-violet light from the sun and tanning beds causes skin cancer and wrinkling.

Your skin has to last a lifetime, so now is the time to start protecting it.

References:

1. Facts about: Skin Cancer in Idaho; Environmental Protection Agency. http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/id_facts_print.pdf
2. US Cancer Statistics Workgroup Source: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/uscs/cancersrankedbystate.aspx#text>.
3. American Cancer Society, Cancer Action Network, Adolescents and Indoor Tanning http://www.acscan.org/ovc_images/file/action/states/mt/Fact_Sheet_-_Adolescents_and_Tanning.pdf



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