

RED WILLOW COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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SKIN CANCER

Summer is here, time for fun in the sun! But, did you realize that childhood exposure to the sun will affect children the rest of their life?

Damage from the sun to a child's skin can actually increase the odds that they will develop skin cancer as adults. Keep them out of the sun during mid-day. Cover them up. Give them hats and teach them to use sunscreen. Children should always wear protective clothing or SPF-15 or higher sunscreens. Consult your doctor before using sunscreen on an infant less than six months old.

The sunrays are most intense between 10:00am and 3:00pm. Try to avoid the mid-day sun when participating in outdoor leisure activities. Wear sun protection even on cloudy days. Apply sunscreen at least thirty minutes before going out in the sun and use it generously. Choose "waterproof" sunscreen if you swim or perspire heavily, reapply every few hours. During intense sun exposure, re-apply sunscreen every 1 ½ hours.

Excessive exposure to the sun is a skin cancer risk factor, especially in light skinned people. Heredity may also be a factor, and people with atypical moles are at a higher risk for development of melanoma. Melanoma is almost always curable in its early stages. We should all know the location and appearance of the moles on our bodies, so any change will be noticed.

Skin cancers are relatively easy to detect and most can be cured. Be alert for pre-cancerous lesions called actinic keratosis. They are small, scaly spots found on the face and back of hands. Actinic keratosis can be removed by cryotherapy (freezing) or by apply a topical chemotherapy or other outpatient procedure.

Basil cell carcinoma usually appears as a small fleshy bump or nodule on the head, neck and hands and occasionally on the trunk of the body, usually as flat growths. They seldom occur on dark skinned individuals but they are the most common skin cancers found in Caucasians. This cancer doesn't spread to other parts of the body, but if untreated, it can extend below the skin to the bone and cause considerable damage.

Squamous cell carcinoma may appear as nodules or as red scaly patches. It is the second most common skin cancer found in Caucasians. It is usually found on the rim of the ear, the face, the lips and mouth. It is rarely found on dark skinned people. This cancer can develop into large masses and it can metastasize (spread). It is estimated that there are 2300 deaths from non-melanoma skin cancers every year. The cure rate for both basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma is 95% when properly treated.

Most people have moles called "nevi" on their skin. Most are harmless but since early stage skin cancers can be easily mistaken for simple moles, it is worth following the American Academy of Dermatologist who can examine your skin regularly for moles with "ABCD" characteristics:

- Asymmetry: is one half of the mole noticeably different in size or color?
- Border: is the edge of the mole indefinite, jagged, or uneven?
- Color: is the mole a uniform tone? Does it have areas of different shades of brown or black or are there dashes of red, white, or blue?
- Diameter: Any mole larger than one-fourth inch across should be brought to your doctor's attention.

Talk to your doctor about any concerns you may have, and be sure to point out any moles you think are unusual. Do a periodic self-exam to insure no part of your body is neglected. Wear your hat and sunscreen and have a safe, cancer-free summer.

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