COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES – DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
OFFICE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH

UV SAFETY – PROTECTION MATTERS!

The recent announcement that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has strengthened the guidelines for sunscreens is a good reminder that protection from the harmful rays of the sun is important. **One in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime and this number is increasing.** (1)

People who have fair skin that freckles or burns easily are at greater risk but even people with darker skin can get skin cancer. A person's risk of skin cancer is related to lifetime exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. UV radiation comes from the sun, sunlamps, tanning beds, tanning booths, or simply by living near the equator. UVA rays cause premature aging (wrinkles, age spots), UVB rays cause burning, and both cause cancer. (2)

What are UVA, UVB and UVC?

- UVA is the most common kind of sunlight at the earth's surface, and reaches beyond the top layer of human skin. Scientists believe that UVA rays can damage connective tissue and increase a person's risk of skin cancer.
- Most UVB rays are absorbed by the ozone layer, so they are less common at the earth's surface than UVA rays. UVB rays don't reach as far into the skin as UVA rays, but they can still be damaging.
- UVC rays are very dangerous, but they are absorbed by the ozone layer and do not reach the ground. (1)

In addition to the risk for skin cancer, the sun can also cause photosensitivity – an abnormally increased skin sensitivity to the sun's ultraviolet rays, causing a rash or unexpected severe sunburn. Photosensitivity can be brought on by certain medical conditions and medications such as ibuprofen, antibiotics, oral contraceptives, and statins as well as perfume, cosmetics, and even the sunscreen that is meant to protect your skin. (3)

Prevention

Every month, check your body for moles and any changes, and see a dermatologist for a professional skin exam periodically or if you see anything suspicious. Cover up in the sun, wear sunglasses with UV protection, avoid outdoor activities between10am and 4pm when the sun's rays are strongest, and use a broad-spectrum sunscreen or sun block with an SPF of 30 or above.

Sunscreens

The sun's UV rays can damage the skin in as little as 15 minutes. Regardless of the SPF, sunscreen should be reapplied about every 2 hours and after swimming or very vigorous physical activity.

The FDA's new guidelines, which go into effect in a year, will make it easier for consumers to choose what will give them the best protection. Any product that fails to offer broad-spectrum (equal) protection for two kinds of the sun's radiation (UVA and UVB) or has an SPF of only 2 to 14 must include a warning that the product has not been shown to help prevent skin cancer or early skin aging.

The guidelines will also ban sunscreen manufacturers from claiming their products are waterproof or sweatproof because such claims are false. Instead, they will be allowed to claim in minutes the amount of time in which the product is water resistant, depending upon test results. (4)

The rules are expected to transform the $680 million domestic market for sunscreens, which has been growing rapidly because of an aging population and growing worries about skin cancer. (5)

ENJOY THE SUN BUT STAY PROTECTED – PREVENTION MATTERS!

1. Centers for Disease Control: http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/index.htm
2. American Cancer Society: http://www.cancer.org
3. http://www.skincancer.org/photosensitivity-a-reason-to-be-even-safer-in-the-sun.html
4. http://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/consumerupdates/ucm258416.htm
5. Harris, G. F.D.A. Unveils New Rules About Sunscreen Claims: NewYorkTimes.com. June 14, 2011
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