



Skin Cancer Prevention and Education Initiative



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides leadership for nationwide efforts to reduce illness and death caused by skin cancer, the most common form of cancer in the United States. The message of CDC's Skin Cancer Primary Prevention and Education Initiative is clear: When in the sun, seek shade, cover up, get a hat, wear sunglasses, and use sunscreen.

The Burden of Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. The two most common types of skin cancer—basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas—are highly curable. However, melanoma, the third most common skin cancer, is more dangerous, especially among young people (2). Approximately, 65%-90% of melanomas are caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light or sunlight (2).

The following statistics refer to new cases of—and deaths from—melanomas of the skin and other non-epithelial skin cancers. These statistics do not include data for basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas, which are not tracked by the United States Cancer Statistics registries.

In 2002 (1),*

- 48,249 people in the United States were diagnosed with skin cancer, 27,268 of them men and 20,981 of them women.

- 45,193 white people and 3,056 non-white people in the United States were diagnosed with skin cancer.

That same year (1),

- 9,904 people in the United States died of skin cancer, 6,371 of them men and 3,533 of them women.
- 9,569 white people and 335 non-white people in the United States died of skin cancer.

Epidemiologic data suggest that skin cancers can be prevented if children, adolescents, and adults are protected from UV radiation (2, 4).

* Incidence counts cover approximately 93% of the U.S. population. Death counts cover 100% of the U.S. population. Use caution in comparing incidence and death counts.

Risk Factors

People with certain risk factors are more likely than others to develop skin cancer. Risk factors vary for different types of skin cancer, but some general risk factors are (2-4):

- Lighter natural skin color.
- Family history of skin cancer.
- Personal history of skin cancer.
- Exposure to the sun through work and play.
- A history of sunburns early in life.
- Skin that burns, freckles, reddens easily, or becomes painful in the sun.
- Blue or green eyes.
- Blond or red hair.
- Certain types and a large number of moles.

Accomplishments

To meet its goal of healthy people in every stage of life, CDC disseminates information about the importance of minimizing UV exposure during childhood. CDC's "Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer," which was published in 2002 in the *Morbidity and Mortality Research and Recommendations* report, is designed to help state and local schools and education agencies play a role in reducing unsafe sun exposure. The publication (available at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5104a1.htm) includes recommendations on

- Establishing policies that reduce exposure to UV radiation.
- Maintaining an environment that supports sun-safety practices.
- Providing health education to students.
- Involving students' families.

- Training health care professionals.
- Evaluating skin cancer prevention programs in schools.

Additionally, CDC has worked with other federal agencies and the independent Task Force on Community Preventive Services to review studies of community-based interventions targeting skin cancer prevention. Recommended interventions are published in the *Guide to Community Preventive Services*, which is available at www.thecommunityguide.org. This publication describes proven strategies that communities can use to plan and implement skin cancer prevention programs.

Risk Reduction

The best way for a person to prevent skin cancer is to protect himself or herself from the sun (2, 4). When used consistently, sun-protective practices can reduce a person's risk of developing skin cancer.

CDC recommends five easy options for sun protection (2, 4):

- Seek shade, especially during midday hours (10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.), when UV rays are strongest and do the most damage.
- Cover up with clothing to protect exposed skin.

- Get a hat with a wide brim to shade the face, head, ears, and neck.
- Grab shades that wrap around and block as close to 100% of both Ultraviolet-A and Ultraviolet-B rays as possible.
- Rub on sunscreen with sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher, and both UVA and UVB protection.

Early Detection

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) has concluded that there is not enough evidence to recommend for or against routine screening (total-body examination by a clinician) to detect skin cancers early. However, USPSTF does recommend 1) that clinicians be aware that fair-skinned men and

women aged 65 or older, and people with atypical moles or more than 50 moles, are at greater risk for developing melanoma and 2) that clinicians remain alert for skin abnormalities when conducting physical examinations for other purposes (5).

Ongoing Work

CDC's skin cancer prevention and education efforts include:

- Funding cancer programs in three states to implement skin cancer activities outlined in the states' Comprehensive Cancer Control (CCC) plans, through the National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program.
- Funding education agencies in three states to collaborate with the states' departments of health to conduct demonstration projects implementing

the "Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer."

- Supporting epidemiologic, behavioral science, and surveillance research efforts designed to expand the knowledge about skin cancer prevention and control.
- Promoting and disseminating "Shade Planning for America's Schools," a manual to help schools create and maintain a physical environment that supports sun safety by ensuring that school grounds have adequate shade (available at www.cdc.gov/cancer/nscpep/).

Future Directions

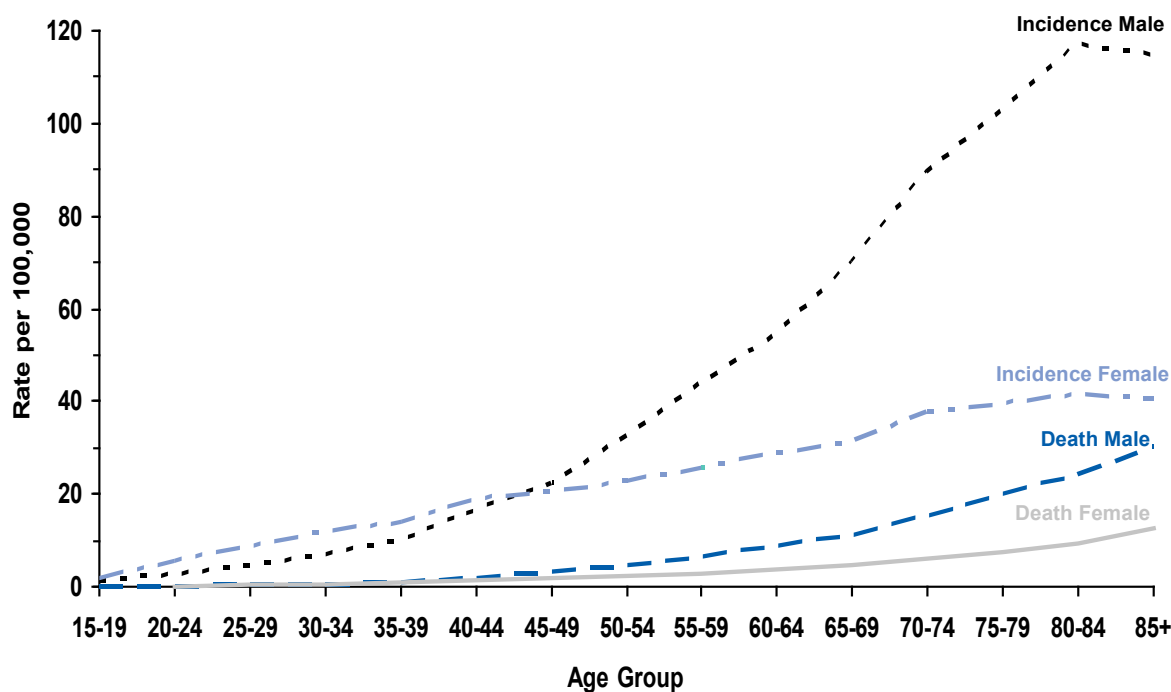
CDC plans to expand its Skin Cancer Prevention Education Initiative to

- Enhance prevention research to identify effective strategies for reducing skin cancer risk.
- Increase support of skin cancer activities described in states' CCC plans. Specifically, CDC's National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program will

fund selected states with approved skin cancer activities.

- Promote, disseminate, and support the implementation of the "Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer."

Melanoma of the Skin (Invasive) Average Annual Age-Specific SEER Incidence and U.S. Death Rates By Sex, 2000-2003



Source: SEER Cancer Statistics Review, 1975-2003

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