

facts about: *Skin Cancer*

# COLORADO

**Skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in the United States.**<sup>1-4</sup> This fact sheet presents statistics about skin cancer for Colorado and the United States as a whole.

## just the facts: *Skin Cancer in Colorado*

- **Sunburns.** A 2004 survey found that 45.1% of white adults in Colorado had at least one sunburn in the past year.<sup>5</sup> Sunburns are a significant risk factor for the development of skin cancer.<sup>6-8</sup>
- **New Cases of Melanoma.** Melanoma—responsible for 75% of all skin cancer deaths—is the 5<sup>th</sup> most commonly diagnosed cancer in Colorado.<sup>9</sup> The annual rate of new melanoma diagnoses in Colorado was 15% higher than the national average from 2002-2006 and was the 13<sup>th</sup> highest in the U.S.<sup>10,11</sup>
  - An estimated 1,260 state residents were diagnosed with melanoma in 2009.<sup>2</sup>
  - Pitkin County has the highest rate of new melanoma diagnoses in the state and ranks among the highest 1% of counties nationwide.<sup>10</sup>
- **Deaths from Melanoma.** About 117 people in Colorado die of melanoma every year.<sup>12</sup> The annual death rate has risen about 1% per year among residents over the age of 50 from 1975 to 2006.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1-42</sup> All references can be found on the SunWise Web site at: [www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html)

## survivor story: *Ken White*



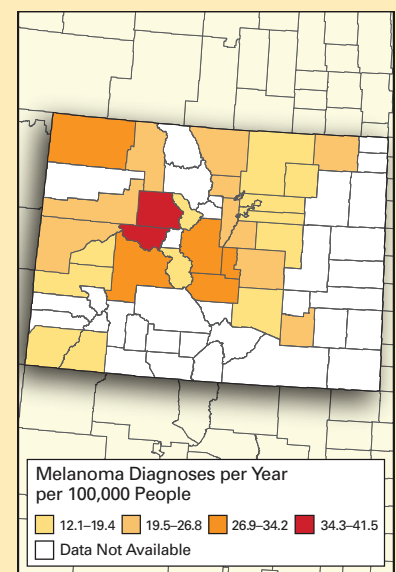
In 2003, my wife noticed a change in the outline and color of a mole on my back, but unfortunately I waited six months to see a doctor. After the biopsies, the conclusion was Stage II melanoma. When I sought a second opinion, they found that the cancer had spread to my lymph nodes: my melanoma was at Stage III.

I was out of work for six months while I went through several rounds of chemotherapy. When the cancer recurred two years later, I underwent radiation therapy that damaged my right lung. I came down with pneumonia and was weak for a long time, but I've been cancer-free ever since.

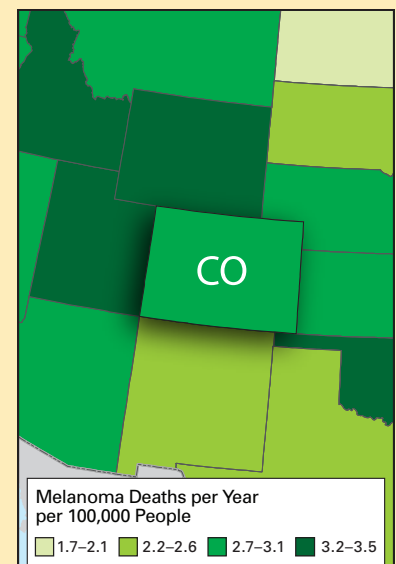
My diagnosis changed my life. I've worked to raise awareness about skin cancer; last year, my daughter and I traveled the world so that she could become the youngest person to ski on all seven continents, raising funds along the way for melanoma research. I've also completely changed my sun protective behavior. Now I always wear sunscreen, UV-protective clothing, and wide-brimmed hats to protect my skin.

Ken White and his daughter Victoria run the Web site [www.mountainsformelanoma.com](http://www.mountainsformelanoma.com).

### Annual Rate of New Melanoma Diagnoses, 2002–2006<sup>10</sup> All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages



### Melanoma Death Rates, 2002–2006<sup>12</sup> All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages



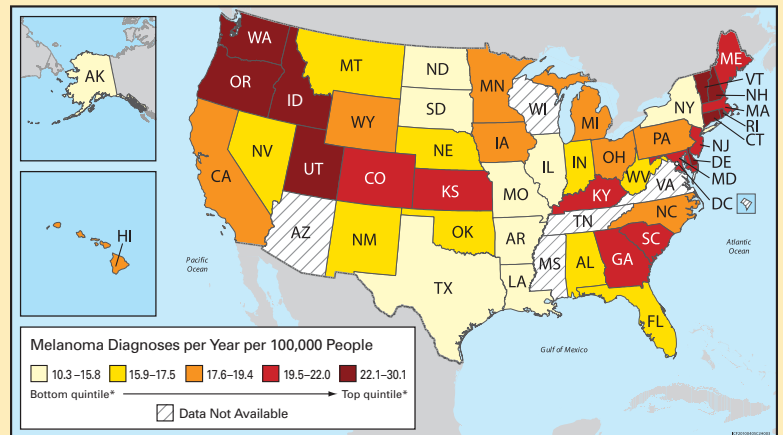
## The Cost of Skin Cancer

*In the U.S., medical costs to treat skin cancer are estimated at almost \$2 billion annually.<sup>14-15</sup>*

### statistics: *Cause for Concern*

- In 2009, more than 1 million people were diagnosed with skin cancer, making it the most common of all cancers.<sup>1-4</sup> More people were diagnosed with skin cancer in 2009 than with breast, prostate, lung, and colon cancer combined.<sup>2</sup> About **1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime.**<sup>17</sup>
- One American dies of melanoma almost every hour.<sup>2</sup>
- Melanoma is the second most common form of cancer for adolescents and young adults (15-29 years old).<sup>18</sup>
- For people born in 2006, 1 in 53 will be diagnosed with melanoma<sup>13</sup>—nearly 30 times the rate for people born in 1930.<sup>19</sup>

**National Annual Rate of New Melanoma Diagnoses, 2002–2006<sup>16</sup>**  
All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages, Age-adjusted Rates



\* Please note that delays in reporting melanoma cases to cancer registries are more common since they are usually diagnosed and treated in non-hospital settings such as physician offices. States are grouped into quintiles based on rates of melanoma diagnoses. A quintile is a statistical “block” representing 20% of a total. Because data are available for only 45 states, each quintile includes nine states. For example, the nine states with the highest melanoma rates—22.1 to 30.1 diagnoses per 100,000 residents every year—are in the top quintile.

### what works: *An Ounce of Prevention*

- **Unprotected exposure to ultraviolet light—a known human carcinogen—is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer.**<sup>6,17,20-24</sup> Taking simple steps as early in life as possible can reduce one’s risk.<sup>2-4,25,26</sup>
- **Early detection of melanoma can save one’s life.**<sup>27-33</sup> Skin examinations may be the best way to detect skin cancer early.<sup>2,34-38</sup>
- The CDC found evidence that **education and policy approaches in primary schools (for children) and in recreational or tourism settings (for adults) can improve sun safety behaviors.**<sup>39-40</sup>
- Student self-reported data<sup>41</sup>—collected as part of the U.S. EPA’s SunWise Program—showed that **teachers using the SunWise Tool Kit for 1-2 hours yearly can spur increases in students’ sun safety knowledge and attitudes and small to modest improvements in short-term sun safety behaviors.**<sup>42</sup>
  - Using the data mentioned above, published modeling results show SunWise teaching between 1999 and 2015 could prevent more than 50 premature deaths and 11,000 future cases of skin cancer, saving the country more than \$30 million in medical costs and productivity losses.<sup>42</sup>

### skin cancer prevention: *Action Steps*

- **Do Not Burn.** Overexposure to the sun is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer.
- **Avoid Sun Tanning and Tanning Beds.** UV light from tanning beds and the sun causes skin cancer and wrinkling.
- **Use Sunscreen.** Generously apply a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Reapply at least every two hours, and after swimming or sweating.
- **Cover Up.** Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses with 99-100% UVA/UVB protection, when possible.
- **Seek Shade.** Seek shade when the sun’s UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- **Watch for the UV Index.** Pay attention to the UV Index when planning outdoor activities to prevent overexposure to the sun.

<sup>1-42</sup> All references can be found on the SunWise Web site at: [www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html)