

Nearly 12,000 Americans die each year from skin cancer, including 8,650 from melanoma, according to the American Cancer Society. In New Jersey, which already has a higher incidence of melanoma skin cancer than the rest of the United States, 2,530 new cases are estimated for 2009. New Jersey's very active beach community provides an opportunity to reach a large number of people who are at high risk for skin cancer due to overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays, the most common risk factor for cutaneous melanoma.

The Melanoma Workgroup of the Governor's Task Force on Cancer Prevention, Early Detection and Treatment in New Jersey implemented the CDC's Choose Your Cover Campaign, a melanoma/skin cancer prevention and educational program, at the state's beaches organized through its county cancer coalitions. The goal of Choose Your Cover is to increase early detection and prevention awareness of melanoma statewide, which is a priority in New Jersey's comprehensive cancer control plan.

Over 1,900 beachgoers were screened at the Jersey shore through Choose Your Cover in 2008 and 2009. The program was initiated as a low-cost demonstration project to increase early detection and education among people who are at high risk for melanoma/skin cancer due to excessive sun exposure. In 2008, Choose Your Cover was implemented at three low-budget beachfront sites. The initial goal was to conduct 300 examinations and educate 1,500 people about melanoma/skin cancer.

On August 2 and 3, 2008, volunteer health professionals exceeded their goal and conducted 541 free skin cancer examinations on a first-come, first-serve basis. Of those screened, 47 were referred for biopsies, including 8 people with the possibility of having the more dangerous melanoma. Volunteers also distributed sunscreen and educational brochures

while teaching sunbathers about this important health concern and how to have fun outdoors while protecting their skin. UV radiation hazards, sun safe practices, the importance of regular skin self-examinations and the early detection of melanoma/skin cancer were discussed during the examinations. UV index signs were displayed at each site and free local radio interviews about melanoma/skin cancer prevention and early detection were broadcast to 120,000 listeners.

Coalition members evaluated the 2008 demonstration project using PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act), and concluded that Ocean County's model supported the local implementation of the state's comprehensive cancer control plan. Recommended changes included improving the community education during the examination and increasing the number of examination sites through three more coastal county cancer coalitions.

The Ocean County model was shared with three additional counties and the number of sites was increased to 11 for the July 25, 2009 Choose Your Cover event. Free skin cancer examinations increased by 154% from 541 in 2008 to 1,376 conducted in 2009. Screeners referred 508 people for follow-up, 54 of whom had suspected melanomas.

More than 100 volunteers, dozens of providers, and 40 organizations and foundations from four county cancer coalitions enthusiastically offered their time, money, food, water, supplies and educational materials to bring the skin cancer prevention and early detection message directly to more Jersey shore beachgoers. The cooperation of the many freeholders, mayors, local hospitals and health departments, doctors, nurses, volunteers and the media made Choose Your Cover 2009 one of the most important cancer examinations in the history of the state.

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