



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Protect Your Skin

*Sunburn and Protective Behaviors among Adults Aged 18–29 Years —
United States, 2000–2010*

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

As the days get warmer, many of us spend more time outside. Protecting skin from the sun should be a priority.

Dawn Holman is a behavioral scientist with CDC's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control. She's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent skin cancer. Welcome to the show, Dawn.

[Ms. Holman] Thanks for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Dawn, how common is skin cancer in the US?

[Ms. Holman] Skin cancers are the most common types of cancer in the US. If current trends continue, one in five Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime.

[Dr. Gaynes] Tell our listeners about the various types of skin cancer.

[Ms. Holman] Sure. There are three main types of skin cancer. Basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. Basal and squamous cell carcinomas are more common. Usually, they're treatable, but they can be disfiguring and costly to treat. Melanoma is less common, but it is actually the most common cancer among adults under the age of 30. In addition, it's much more deadly.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some factors that increase our risk for getting skin cancer?

[Ms. Holman] Well, UV exposure from the sun or from tanning beds is the main cause of skin cancer. In fact, just one sunburn during childhood *doubles* your risk of getting skin cancer later in life. Anyone can get skin cancer, but people with certain risk factors are more likely than others to develop it. For example, you're at a higher risk if you have a lighter natural skin color; if you have a family history of skin cancer or a personal history of skin cancer; if your skin burns, freckles, reddens easily, or becomes painful in the sun; if you have blue or green eyes or blond or red hair; and also if you have more than 50 moles or certain types of moles. Individuals with a history of extensive sun exposure, tanning bed use, and sunburns are also at an increased risk.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the symptoms of skin cancer?

[Ms. Holman] A change in your skin is the most common sign of skin cancer. This could be a new growth, a sore that doesn't heal, or a change in a mole. Not all skin cancers look the same. For melanoma, a simple way to remember what to look for is to remember the A-B-C-D-Es of melanoma. 'A' stands for asymmetrical. Does the mole or spot have an irregular shape with two very different looking halves? 'B' stands for border. Are the borders irregular or jagged? 'C' is for color. Is the color uneven? 'D' is for diameter. Is the mole or spot larger than the size of a pea? And 'E' is for evolving. Has the mole or spot changed over the past few weeks or months?

[Dr. Gaynes] Dawn, how often should people be screened for skin cancer?

[Ms. Holman] Well, routine screening is not generally recommended for skin cancer, but talk to your doctor if you notice changes in your skin, such as a new growth, a sore that doesn't heal, a change in an old growth, or any of the A-B-C-D-Es of melanoma.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some ways we can protect ourselves from the harmful effects of the sun?

[Ms. Holman] There are a number of ways we can all protect our skin while we're enjoying the outdoors. We recommend using a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher which can reduce your risk of sunburn, skin cancer, and even wrinkles and age spots. Sunscreen wears off, so be sure to reapply every two hours or after swimming or sweating. Clothing, sunglasses, and shade also provide protection from the sun. The sun's rays are most intense during the midday, so scheduling your outdoor activities before 10 in the morning or after about 4 in the afternoon can help reduce your sun exposure. Avoiding indoor tanning is also a great way to protect your skin.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about skin cancer prevention?

[Ms. Holman] Our website on skin cancer is a great resource. You can find it at www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Dawn. I've been talking today with CDC's Dawn Holman about ways to prevent skin cancer.

Remember: Protecting your skin from the harmful effects of the sun when you're younger can help prevent problems later in life. Using sunscreen, wearing protective clothing, and lounging in the shade can help decrease the chances of sunburn.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.