

NEWS RELEASE
Skin Cancer Awareness

Summer is here, the sun is shining and it's time to go outdoors and enjoy the beautiful weather. Before we head outside, the Cayuga County Department of Health reminds us that we should take a few simple precautions to protect ourselves and our children from the sun's harmful rays. Unprotected exposure to the sun can cause premature aging, eye damage and skin cancer.

“Protection from the sun is important all year around. The sun sends out harmful ultraviolet rays (UV-A and UV-B), which we cannot see. Long-term, unprotected exposure to these UV rays causes up to 90 percent of all skin cancer. In fact, skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States,” said Dr. Philip Gioia, Medical Consultant of the Cayuga County Department of Health.

More than one million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States this year. Most of a person's lifetime skin damage, which increases the risk for skin cancer, occurs before the age of 18.

“Remember, sunburned or tanned skin is damaged skin. Even if a child's sunburn or tan fades, the damage caused by that tan or burn does not. The damage keeps adding up with each sunburn or tan and may one day result in skin cancer. No matter how hard adults work at protecting their skin, the sun damage they received as children cannot be reversed,” Dr. Gioia warned.

The good news is that skin cancer is one of the most preventable forms of cancer. Follow these simple steps for sensible sun protection:

- Keep infants out of the sun.
- Limit the amount of time children spend in the sun.

- Schedule outside activities for early morning or late afternoon. Avoid the hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when the sun's UV rays are strongest and most harmful.
- Keep children in the shade. Use an umbrella or a tent or a tree. Carriages and strollers with hoods and canopies provide shade for babies and toddlers.
- Make sure to cover children up when they are in the sun. Choose clothes such as long-sleeved shirts and long shorts that are made from tightly woven fabrics. Wear wide-brimmed hats that shade the face, scalp, neck and ears

Be especially careful to protect children from the sun on cloudy or hazy days.

Clouds do not block most UV rays. Also, be careful around surfaces, such as sand, cement and water, which can reflect the sun's rays on the skin.

When out in the sun, be aware of the effects of certain medications. Some prescriptions and over-the-counter medications can cause the skin to be more sensitive to the sun.

Know how to protect your skin with sunscreen. The Cayuga County Department of Health recommends these tips:

- Use sunscreen that has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher Rub a generous amount of sunscreen on all uncovered skin. Do not apply to the eyes.
- Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside.
- Use a sunscreen stick or lip balm on sensitive areas, such as the lips, nose, ears, hands and feet.
- Choose a water-resistant or waterproof sunscreen for children playing in the water.
- Re-apply sunscreen every two hours.
- Towel-dry your child before re-applying sunscreen if your child has been swimming.

For more information about skin cancer and protecting yourself and your family from the sun's harmful rays, call the Cayuga County Department of Health at (315) 253-1560.