



NIAGARA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
5467 Upper Mountain Road, Suite 100
Lockport, New York 14094-1894

Daniel J. Stapleton, MBA
Public Health Director

(716) 439-7435 Telephone
(716) 439-7402 Fax

Press Release

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Save Your Skin

Contact: Claudia Kurtzworth
Public Health Educator
278-8596

We have been fortunate to have a taste of summer-like weather as we head into the month of June. Warm days and the blazing sun remind us that summer is right around the corner. However, we need to remember to protect our skin from the sun's harmful rays. 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% of all skin cancers. In fact, skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States.

Most of a person's lifetime skin damage occurs before the age of 18 so it is vital to protect the skin of children and adolescents. Remember that sunburned or tan skin is damaged skin. Even if a tan fades the damage caused by the sunburn or tan does not. The damage keeps adding up and may lead to skin cancer. Skin cancer may occur anywhere on the body. There are three kinds of skin cancer: squamous, basal and melanoma. Melanoma is a form of skin cancer that usually begins in a mole. Because melanoma spreads quickly to other organs it causes the most skin cancer deaths. It is estimated that 8,000 people die each year from melanoma. The number of new cases of melanoma is on the rise and is the most common form of cancer in women aged 25-29. Too much exposure to ultraviolet radiation is the main risk factor for skin cancer; however, other characteristics such as light skin that freckles easily or having naturally blonde or red hair can increase the risk of developing skin cancer. If there is a change or occurrence of a mole on your skin it is advised to consult with your health care provider.

The good news is that skin cancer is one of the most preventable forms of cancer. We can protect children and ourselves every time we go out into the sun all year 'round. Avoiding direct sun between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are the strongest is important. Applying a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher is recommended. An SPF factor can block out 93% of UV rays and an SPF of 30 blocks out 97% of UV rays. It is important to remember to apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going out into the sun and after swimming or perspiring and every 2-4 hours of exposure. Also your sunscreen from last year may not be effective as it most likely has expired after one year. Wearing a hat to protect the head and face can also lessen the exposure to UV rays. It is also important to note that even on cloudy days UV rays are present, so wearing a sunscreen is recommended.

For more information on skin cancer prevention go to the New York State Department of Health website at www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/cancer/skin.

PUBLIC HEALTH: PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.