

Jersey Summer Shore Safety: Be Safe Out in the Sun

Fact Sheet FS1132



Cooperative Extension

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As the winter ends, and the sun emerges, people head outside to pursue their favorite outdoor activities. Whether you are spending time sailing, surfing, kayaking, boating, swimming, bird watching, shopping, exercising, or strolling, there are important things you and your family need to know about spending time in the sun.

reach as far into the skin as UVA rays, however they can still damage the skin. Skin cancer is the most common of all cancer types, and over one million Americans are diagnosed each year (ACS, 2008). Current estimates are that 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime (AAD, 2009).

Benefits of the Sun and Outdoors

The sun is essential to all life on earth. It provides the energy for plants to grow, and its rays provide humans with an essential source of vitamin D. Although we often take vitamin D in supplement form, the most efficient way for us to capture this important vitamin is from moderate exposure to the sun (Harvard Medical School Family Guide, Benefits of Moderate Sun Exposure). In addition, studies have shown that being outside can have significant health benefits ranging from elevating the mood to increased physical activity due to a variety of outdoor sports and gardening. Healthy exposure to the sun is 10-15 minutes per day.

Protecting Yourself Outdoors

There are several ways you can protect yourself from harmful UVA and UVB rays while recreating in the outdoors. Limit your sun exposure at midday, the hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. daylight savings time (9 a.m. to 3 p.m. standard time) when the sun is strongest. Wear loose-fitting protective clothing with long sleeves and long pants made from a tightly woven fabric. Also wear wide-brimmed hats to protect the head, face, neck, and ears. If you engage in water sports, or just want a quick drying, lightweight layer, a rash guard might be a good choice. Originally designed to protect surfers from the wax and sand on their boards, these tight knit long and short sleeve garments offer good sun protection, and many come with specific SPF ratings (The Surfing Handbook, 2010). The Center for Disease Control (CDC) also recommends using sunglasses with UVA and UVB protection to protect the eyes in addition to protective clothing.

Risks of Sun Exposure

However, exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UV) can be harmful to our skin, and may ultimately cause skin cancer. UVA rays are the most common type of sunlight at the surface of the earth and reach below the top layer of human skin. While most UVB rays are absorbed by the ozone layer, they are less likely to reach the earth's surface. The UVB rays don't

Liberal apply (about a palmful) sunscreen with a protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 with UVA and UVB protection, to dry skin 30 minutes BEFORE going out into the sun. Sunscreen should also be used on cloudy and cool days. Be

sure to check the expiration date on the sunscreen, since it may have a shelf life of no more than three years. Keep in mind that the shelf life of sunscreen is shorter if it has been stored at high temperatures. Use waterproof sunscreen if you will be participating in water sports or in activities that make you sweat, but realize if you are out longer than 80 minutes, you may need to reapply (ACS, 2008).

Women should consider using cosmetics that add SPF protection. Make-up and lip balms often contain protective ingredients, however if they do not contain at least SPF 15 or higher, do not use them by themselves. A layer of sunscreen under cosmetics may be applied for additional protection.

Children should be closely monitored while playing in the sun or at the beach. Every time a child plays outdoors sunscreen should be applied liberally and reapplied often for the best protection. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), even a few serious sunburns can increase your child's risk of getting skin cancer.

Information about the daily UV index is often included in weather forecasts, and can be accessed online at: www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html.

By following these easy guidelines, you can ensure that you and your family enjoy recreating outdoors while being protected from the risks of sun exposure. For more

information on Summer Shore Safety, visit the Jersey Summer Shore Safety Web site ocean.njaes.rutgers.edu/marine/JerseySummerShoreSafety.html

References

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