



Skin Cancer Prevention / Sunscreen Use in Schools

Fact

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. One bad sunburn in childhood doubles the risk of skin cancer later in life. Damage from exposure to UV rays builds up over time, so sun protection should start at an early age. Most skin cancers can be prevented.

The Georgia Department of Public Health Cancer Data Report (2016) shows skin cancer incidence and mortality rates in Georgia.

New cases

On average, 2,320 new cases of malignant melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer, are diagnosed in Georgia every year - 1,365 cases in males and 955 cases in females. Since 2000, melanoma incidence rates have been increasing at an average annual rate of 2.6 percent.

North Georgia, North, Cobb & Douglas, Fulton, East Metro and Northeast Health Districts have significantly higher incidence rates than the state rate. Northwest, Clayton, DeKalb, South Central, North Central, East Central, West Central, South, Southwest, Coastal and Southeast Health Districts have significantly lower rates than the state rate.

Deaths

On average 225 Georgians die from melanoma every year - 150 males and 75 females. Since 1990, melanoma mortality rates have been decreasing at an average annual rate of 0.5 percent.

North Georgia, Coastal and Northeast Health Districts have significantly higher mortality rates than the state rate. Fulton and East Metro Health Districts have significantly lower rates than the state rate.

Skin Cancer Prevention in Schools

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer](#), outlines steps that school communities can take to develop a comprehensive approach to reducing the risk for skin cancer among students, teachers, staff and visitors.

- Establish policies that reduce exposure to solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation.
- Provide and maintain physical and social environments that support sun safety.
- Provide opportunities for students to gain the knowledge, develop the attitudes, and practice the skills needed to prevent skin cancer.
- Involve family members in skin cancer prevention efforts.
- Provide pre-service and in-service skin cancer prevention education for school administrators, teachers, coaches, school nurses, and other professionals who work with students.
- Support sun-safety policies, sun-safe environments, and skin cancer prevention education with school health services.
- Evaluate the implementation of policies, environmental change, education, family involvement, professional development and health services.

Skin Cancer Protective Behaviors

The CDC recommends using **various methods** that reduce exposure to the full spectrum of UV radiation as the first line of protection against skin cancer and using sunscreen as a complementary measure.

- Minimize exposure to the sun during peak hours 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Seek shade from the midday sun 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Wear protective clothing, hats and sunglasses that protect the skin.
- Use a broad spectrum with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or more.
- Avoid sunlamps and tanning beds.

What to Look for When You Buy Sunscreen

Most sunscreen products work by absorbing, reflecting or scattering sunlight. They contain chemicals that interact with the skin to protect it from UV rays.

- Pick a broad-spectrum sunscreen that protects against UV-A and UV-B rays and has a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15.
- Read product labels. Look for a waterproof brand if you will be sweating or swimming. Buy a nonstinging product or one specifically formulated for your face.
- Buy a brand that does not contain para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA) if you are sensitive to that ingredient.
- Not all sunscreens have the same ingredients. Try a sunscreen with different chemicals if your skin reacts badly to the one that you are using.
- Use a water-based sunscreen if you have oily skin or are prone to acne.
- Be aware that more expensive does not mean better. Although a costly brand might feel or smell better, it is not necessarily more effective than a less expensive product.
- Check the sunscreen's expiration date. Sunscreen without an expiration date has a shelf life of no more than three years, but its shelf life is shorter if it has been exposed to high temperatures.

When to Apply Sunscreen

Using sunscreen does not mean it is safe to spend more time in the sun, especially when the UV Index is high. Although a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher offers protection from sunburn, it does not block all the sun's damaging rays. Apply broad spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 15 30 minutes before you go outside, even on slightly cloudy or cool days.

- Reapply sunscreen after swimming, strenuous exercise or toweling off.
- Apply sunscreen again throughout the day if you stay in the sun for more than two hours.

How to Apply Sunscreen

- Sunscreen comes in a variety of forms – lotions, wipes or gels. However, to be effective, sunscreens must be applied correctly.
- Shake well before use to mix particles that might be clumped up in the container. Consider using the new spray-on or stick types of sunscreen.
- Be sure to apply enough sunscreen. As a rule of thumb, use an ounce (a handful) to cover your entire body.
- Use on all parts of your skin exposed to the sun, including the ears, back, shoulders and the back of the knees and legs.
- Apply thickly and thoroughly.
- Use care when applying sunscreen around the eyes.

Additional Resources

https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/pdf/sunsafety_v0908.pdf
https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/sun-safety-tips-schools.htm
https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/pdf/shade_planning.pdf
<https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/pdf/cycparentsbrochure.pdf>