

Countywide Services Agency

Department of
Health and Human Services

Division of Public Health

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Sacramento's Sizzling Summer Sun Means It's Time to Raise Awareness of UV Rays

A sizzling summer holiday weekend is here, and along with the sun comes cancer-causing ultraviolet rays. July is UV safety month, dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of protecting yourself from harmful UV light.

During the summer season, the sun's rays are up to nine times stronger than in the winter months. Sacramento County Public Health Officer Glennah Trochet, M.D. said, "Sunburns are the most obvious evidence of exposure to excessive UV rays. Not only are sunburns painful, they are preventable".

"Overexposure to UV rays is the number one cause of skin cancer, and it's preventable" said Dr. Trochet. "Skin cancer is the most frequent type of cancer diagnosed in the US, so it is important that we do whatever we can to prevent sunburn," says Dr. Trochet. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH), estimates that about 128,000 Californians will get skin cancer this year, and one of every five persons in California is expected to eventually get skin cancer.

"The same UV rays that can damage your skin can harm your eyes as well. When you protect yourself from the sun, don't just think sunscreen – think sunglasses and a hat," said Dr. Trochet. "Excessive exposure to ultraviolet light reflected off sand, snow or pavement can burn the eye's surface. Similar to sunburns, eye surface burns usually disappear within a couple of days, but may lead to further complications such as cataracts later in life. While we want people to be active and enjoy the outdoors, there are relatively easy ways to protect yourself against harm from the sun," says Dr. Trochet.

"The best way to protect your eyes is with a pair of UV blocking sunglasses," says Dr. Trochet. "Sunglasses don't have to be expensive to offer the right kind of UV protection, even inexpensive glasses can protect your eyes if they offer 99 to 100 percent UV protection".

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The CDPH states that children before age ten are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of UV radiation. Both childhood sunburns and tanning increase a child's risk of developing skin cancer as an adult. Children are at greater risk to UV rays because they are unaware of the fact they are being burned. It is the responsibility of parents to make sure their children are being protected from the UV rays.

Tips to consider for avoiding harmful UV radiation:

- Avoid direct exposure to the sun between 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. by remaining indoors or staying in shade. This is when the sun's UV rays are at peak levels.
- Use sunscreen with minimum of 15 SPF. Reapplication may be necessary after swimming or rigorous activity/perspiration.
- Wear protective items such as broad-brimmed hats and sunglasses. Only use sunglasses with 99 to 100 percent UV protection.
- Avoid artificial sources of UV light (tanning beds). Excessive exposure to UV rays, regardless of the source, causes cancer.

For more information about UV Protection Month, visit the Sacramento County Public Health web site at <http://www.SCPH.com>.