

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Skin Cancer

Coldwater, MI. Spending hours in the sun to get that great tan is quickly becoming a thing of the past. Skin cancer is now the most common form of cancer in the United States. Between 1982 to 2011, rates of melanomas, the deadliest form of skin cancer, doubled according to a 2015 report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Yet as much as 20% of future cases can be prevented. Dr. Bivins, West Michigan Cancer Center, Sturgis Campus states “Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a hat and clothes that cover your skin. Find some shade if you’re outside, especially in the middle of the day when the dangerous rays from the sun are most intense, and apply broad-spectrum sunscreen.” Since the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) rays can damage the skin in as little as 15 minutes, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers the following recommendations for how to safely enjoy being active outdoors:

- **Seek Shade** - Reduce the risk of skin damage and skin cancer by seeking shade under an umbrella, tree, or other shelter before you need relief from the sun. Your best bet to protect your skin is to use sunscreen or wear protective clothing when you’re outside—even when you’re in the shade.
- **Wear Sun Safe Clothing** - When possible, wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants and skirts can provide protection from UV rays. Clothes made from tightly woven fabric offer the best protection. A wet T-shirt offers much less UV protection than a dry one, and darker colors may offer more protection than lighter colors. Some clothing certified under international standards comes with information on its ultraviolet protection factor. If wearing this type of clothing isn’t practical, at least try to wear a T-shirt or a beach cover-up. Keep in mind that a typical T-shirt has an SPF rating lower than 15, so use other types of protection as well.

- **Don a Hat** - For the most protection, wear a hat with a brim all the way around that shades your face, ears, and the back of your neck. A tightly woven fabric, such as canvas, works best to protect your skin from UV rays. Avoid straw hats with holes that let sunlight through. A darker hat may offer more UV protection. If you wear a baseball cap, you should also protect your ears and the back of your neck by wearing clothing that covers those areas, using sunscreen with at least SPF 15, or by staying in the shade.
- **Sport a Pair of Sunglasses** - Sunglasses protect your eyes from UV rays and reduce the risk of cataracts. They also protect the tender skin around your eyes from sun exposure. Sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays offer the best protection. Most sunglasses sold in the United States, regardless of cost, meet this standard. Wrap-around sunglasses work best because they block UV rays from sneaking in from the side.
- **Lather on the Sunscreen** - Put on broad spectrum sunscreen with at least SPF 15 before you go outside, even on slightly cloudy or cool days. Don't forget to put a thick layer on all parts of exposed skin. Get help for hard-to-reach places like your back. And remember, sunscreen works best when combined with other options to prevent UV damage. Be sure to reapply, especially if you are out in the sun for more than two hours and after swimming, sweating or toweling off.

Most sun protection products work by absorbing, reflecting, or scattering sunlight. They contain chemicals that interact with the skin to protect it from UV rays. All products do not have the same ingredients; if your skin reacts badly to one product, try another one or call a doctor.

Part of being healthy is to understand your risks and taking steps to reduce them. By following these suggestions, you can protect your skin and reduce your risk for developing skin cancer.

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