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Sun Safety Every Day, All Year

1. What's going on at the health department this month?

Michele: Today South Heartland brought one of our community partners in to talk about what we are doing to help reduce skin cancer in our counties.

The South Heartland Cancer Coalition, a group of partners committed to reducing cancer in south central Nebraska, is taking the lead in educating residents on the importance of preventing skin cancer through sun safe practices and screening for early detection.

2. How much of a problem is skin cancer in our area? How common is it?

Michele: According to the American Cancer Society skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States and is a concern in the South Heartland health district of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties. The rates of new cases of skin cancer diagnosed (about 14 cases each year) and the rates of death from skin cancer (about 2-3 deaths each year) are higher in the South Heartland area than in Nebraska overall.

3. Is there more than one type of skin cancer?

Dorrann: There are three main types of skin cancer: basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma. Basal cell and squamous cell cancers are the most common skin cancers and seldom become life threatening. These cancers can be removed but this can cause scarring and disfigurement of the affected area which most often is the face, nose and ears. Melanoma is the most serious type of skin cancer. Melanoma can be cured when found early, but melanomas that are not found early can be fatal when they spread and reach vital organs, making treatment less successful.

4. Tell us about what the South Heartland Cancer Coalition is doing to help reduce skin cancer rates.

Dorrann: Due to the high rates of skin cancer cases and deaths in this area, one of our coalition partners, Mary Lanning's Morrison Cancer Center, focused their prevention and screening activities on skin cancer this past year. Sally Molnar, director of MCC, can share some of what they have been doing this past year.

Sally: The MCC staff have been sharing a message that skin cancer is preventable if sun safe practices are utilized. In 2018, the MCC outreach focused on educating youth ages 12-17 years on sun safety and why catching skin cancer early is beneficial. The MCC team gave presentations to 357 students in local schools. Students completed a pre and post questionnaire to determine how much they already knew and how much new information they learned from the presentations. Success story: following the presentation, students demonstrated increased awareness of sun safe practices and more students understood the importance of being sun safe to prevent skin cancers later in life.

5. What causes skin cancer? How does the sun actually cause damage to the skin?

Michele: Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun or from artificial sources like tanning beds are the most common cause of skin cancer. UV rays can damage DNA which is the genetic material in our cells. It is important to recognize sunburn as a type of skin damage caused by the sun. Tanning is also a sign of the skin reacting to UV radiation by producing additional pigmentation. That means that tanned skin is also damaged skin, so no tan is ever a safe tan.

Harmful rays from the sun and from tanning beds may also cause eye problems, weaken your immune system, and give you skin spots, wrinkles, or "leathery" skin.

6. Who is most at risk to get skin cancer?

Sally: Anyone, no matter their skin tone, can get skin cancer, but some people are at higher risk. If you have lighter natural skin color or skin that burns easily or forms freckles in the sun, you are at higher risk for skin cancer. If you experienced sunburns early in life or spend time working or playing in the sun, you are at higher risk for skin cancer. Family history or having close relatives who have had melanoma also puts you at higher risk. Talk with your doctor if you have a family history of melanoma.

7. So let's get to what everyone needs to know: What can people do to protect themselves?

Dorrann: The South Heartland Cancer Coalition is encouraging everyone to make sun safety part of everyday practices, all year 'round: teens and adults can greatly reduce the risk for developing skin cancer by practicing the sun safe behaviors while still enjoying time outdoors. I'd like to highlight several different ways people can protect themselves and their children:

Be Serious about Sunscreen

Not all sunscreens are created equal so it is important to always check the product's label. When choosing a sunscreen make sure it has a "sun protection factor" (SPF) of 30 or higher. SPF represents the degree to which a sunscreen can protect the skin from sunburn – all year around. Your sunscreen should also provide "broad spectrum" protection—sunscreen that protects against all types of skin damage caused by sunlight. And, lastly, be sure to choose a sunscreen that is water resistant—sunscreen that stays on your skin longer, even if it gets wet. When applying, use a generous amount and don't forget to protect your ears, nose, lips, back of your neck and tops of feet. Sunscreen works best when used with shade or clothes, and it must be re-applied every 2 hours and after swimming, sweating, or toweling off. Reapply water-resistant sunscreens as instructed on the label.

8. Does staying in the shade help?

Dorrann: **Yes. It is important to seek shade, especially during midday hours.** Limit sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest. Even on an overcast day, up to 80 percent of the sun's UV rays can get through the clouds. Stay in the shade as much as possible throughout the day.

Dorrann: It is also important to Cover Up and protect your eyes

Wear a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, and protective clothing to protect your skin and your eyes. If you plan on being outside on a sunny day, cover as much of your body as possible. Protect your eyes from UV rays which can lead to cataracts later in life. Look for sunglasses that wrap around and block close to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays.

9. Some people have freckles or moles or “age spots” – is there a way to know whether any of these are just normal or whether they could be a sign of something that could lead to cancer?

Dorrann: We encourage people to check their skin monthly and look for changes in the number, size, shape and color of spots on your skin. Melanoma may start on your skin without warning or it may start in or near a mole or dark spot in the skin. See your doctor if you find new or changing skin coloration or growths.

10. So if people practice these steps, are you saying that skin cancer is preventable?

Dorrann: Skin cancer is preventable by practicing sun safety to protect your skin. And remember, that there is no “safe” tan. South Heartland Cancer Coalition members will be providing sun safety education at the upcoming Vital Signs Health Fair in Adams County in March at the Nuckolls County Health Fair in April.

Sally: We would like to encourage anyone who wants to find out more about their risk for skin cancer and how to reduce their chances of getting skin cancer, to stop in and visit the Sun Safety Education and Screening area at the and education plus limited skin screenings by licensed providers at the Vital Signs Health Fair at the Adams County Fairgrounds on March 23 and 24. Educational materials will be available for everyone and free skin scope assessments and skin cancer screenings by licensed providers will be available for adults 19 years and older.

11. If people want more information, where can they go?

Michele: For more information, tips and videos on skin cancer and how to prevent it, visit the following websites:

- <http://southheartlandhealth.org>
- <http://www.cdc.gov>
- <https://www.cancer.org/>

12. Any closing thoughts?

Michele: Skin cancer is preventable and sun safety is never out of season. So, when you are outdoors working, exercising or just enjoying the sun, make sure you are well protected from its rays.



Michele Bever, Executive Director
Dorrann Hultman, Community Health Services Coordinator

Sun Damage and Skin Cancer: Protect Yourself All Year 'Round

- 1. What's going on at the health department this month? (Michele)**
- 2. How much of a problem is skin cancer in our area? How common is it? (Michele)**
- 3. Is there more than one type of skin cancer? (Dorrann)**
- 4. Tell us about what the South Heartland Cancer Coalition is doing to help reduce skin cancer rates. (Dorrann, Sally)**
- 5. What causes skin cancer? How does the sun actually cause damage to the skin? (Michele)**
- 6. Who is most at risk to get skin cancer? (Sally)**
- 7. So let's get to what everyone needs to know: What can people do to protect themselves? (Dorrann)**
- 8. Does staying in the shade help? (Dorrann)**
- 9. Some people have freckles or moles or "age spots" – is there a way to know whether any of these are just normal or whether they could be a sign of something that could lead to cancer? (Dorrann)**
- 10. So if people practice these steps, are you saying that skin cancer is preventable? (Dorrann, Sally)**
- 11. If people want more information, where can they go? (Michele)**
- 12. Any closing thoughts? (Michele)**