

Block the Sun, Not the Fun!

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. Locally, Adams County ranks 14th highest for our rates of skin cancer when compared to all 93 counties – with an average of 10 cases diagnosed each year.

This summer, South Heartland, along with partners Morrison Cancer Center and the Nebraska Cancer Coalition, are sharing the message that skin cancer is preventable. We are encouraging sun safe practices to prevent sun damage along with regular skin cancer screenings for early detection.

Types of Skin Cancer. 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.

Some People Have Higher Risk. 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. In fact, having 5 or more sunburns doubles your risk for melanoma!

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.

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.

Importance of Screening. Early detection of skin cancer is the key to saving lives. If the cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, the outcomes can be much better. Many healthcare providers recommend doing a skin self-exam once a month to check for any new growth or changes in existing moles or other spots. Regular skin exams are often a part of routine health checkups – and people at higher risk of melanoma, especially, should get screened every year.

Mary Lanning's Morrison Cancer Center is promoting the importance of skin screenings and is even offering free skin screening opportunities at a few local summer events.

Prevention. What can you do to prevent skin cancer? Make sun safety part of your everyday practices, all year 'round:

1. Seek shade, especially during midday hours. Limit sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 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.

2. 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.

3. Use a “broad spectrum” sunscreen with a “sun protection factor” (SPF) of 30 or more to protect exposed skin. “Broad spectrum” protection means the sunscreen protects against all types of skin damage caused by sunlight. SPF represents the degree to which a sunscreen can protect the skin from sunburn. Be sure to choose a sunscreen that is water resistant which means it will stay 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.

4. Check your 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.

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. Block the sun, not the fun!

For more information on skin cancer and how to prevent it visit www.southheartlandhealth.ne.gov or the Nebraska Cancer Coalition at necancer.org.

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