

Skin cancer increasingly common in teens and young adults

May 7 2012

(Medical Xpress) -- With summer just around the corner, pediatricians at Johns Hopkins Children's Center are sounding the alarm on a disturbing trend: A growing number of teenagers and young adults diagnosed with skin cancer.

While unprotected sun exposure, indoor tanning and repeated sun burns at any age can all lead to [skin cancer](#), experts say, sun damage in childhood fuels a lifetime of risk.

During May — Skin Cancer Prevention and Detection Month — pediatric dermatologists are reminding parents that childhood sun exposure is the most preventable risk factor for both melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers.

“A burn at age 25 is not as damaging as a burn at the tender age of 4 so we have a critical window in childhood to minimize life-time risk,” says Bernard Cohen, M.D., director of pediatric dermatology at Hopkins Children's.

Prevention among infants and children

Cohen advises the parents and other caregivers of young children to:

-- limit sun exposure to mornings and late afternoons when the sun is weaker

-- use broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher on the entire body and long-sleeved clothing and wide-rim hats during any sun exposure

-- apply broad-spectrum sunscreen on all exposed areas year-round

Prevention in teenagers and pre-teens

One group of particular concern are those between the ages of 12 and 18, whose relative independence and fondness for tanning drive them to use indoor [tanning beds](#) and put them at high risk for melanoma and other forms of skin cancer. Tanning beds are a constant threat, Cohen warns. Classified as a carcinogen by the World Health Organization, tanning beds pack more punch than the sun because they deliver more concentrated doses of UV radiation, Cohen says.

Although many states and municipalities have passed laws requiring parental consent for minors to use tanning beds, and other states have banned indoor tanning altogether, such laws are not uniformly or tightly enforced, Cohen says.

Pediatricians, Cohen says, who have a captive audience of teenagers and parents during annual well-child visits should make a point of discussing the dangers of indoor tanning and irresponsible sun exposure. They also should perform full-body checks for suspicious moles and teach patients and parents the “ABCD’s” of skin cancer detection: asymmetrical shape, border irregularities, color changes and diameter growth.

Research conducted in the last 10 years has repeatedly shown a growing number of young adults developing skin cancer. Most recently, a Mayo Clinic study found a six-fold jump in the rates of melanoma — the deadliest form of skin cancer — among 18-to-39-year-olds over the last 40 years. Women had an eight-fold increase, compared with a four-fold increase in men. The researchers attribute the gender difference to

higher tan-seeking behaviors among young women, including outdoor [sun exposure](#) and [indoor tanning](#).

An earlier study, published in 2008 in the Journal of Investigative Dermatology, found that the incidence of melanoma in males increased from 4.7 per 100,000 in 1973 to 7.7 cases per 100,000 in 2004. The incidence among females jumped from 5.5 to 14 per 100,000.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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