

Sun-safe pool policies appear related to sun safety behaviors among pool staff

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The social environment at swimming pools appears to be related to sun safety behaviors of outdoor pool staff, according to a report in the February issue of Archives of Dermatology, one of the JAMA/Archives journals.

"Skin cancer accounts for almost half of all cancers diagnosed in the United States, and there is both direct and indirect evidence that sun exposure can cause skin cancer," according to background information in the article. Outdoor lifeguards and aquatic instructors are particularly at high risk for overexposure to the sun because they are young and because they work outdoors. Sunburn tends to be common among young adults in high school and college due to poor sun protection habits. "About 50 percent of aquatic staff had a history of severe sunburn and almost 80 percent had experienced sunburn the previous summer."

"Interventions in the workplace may be effective for reducing sun exposure and improving sun protective behaviors of outdoor workers, but there are few published reports of sun protection interventions in occupational settings and inconsistent findings across those reports," the authors note.

Dawn M. Hall, M.P.H., and colleagues at the Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, Atlanta, studied data collected from the Pool Cool skin cancer prevention program to analyze the associations among the pool environment, social norms and outdoor lifeguards' and aquatic instructors' sun protection habits and sunburns in 2001 and 2002. Demographic information was also noted.

A total of 191 pools participated in the program during one or both summers. There were 699 participants in 2001 and 987 participants in 2002 (ages 15 to 60). Most participants were white and female and more than half were between the ages of 15 and 19.

More than 80 percent of respondents reported habitually wearing sunglasses and more than 60 percent reported wearing sunscreen regularly, while less than half reported regularly using a shirt with sleeves, staying in the shade or wearing a hat while exposed to the sun. More than 60 percent of participants taught the Pool Cool sun safety lessons each year. "There was a trend toward fewer sunburns as social norms, pool policies and participation in the Pool Cool program increased, but results differed across the two years," the authors write. "In 2001, lower social norms scores and pool policy scores were associated with more reported sunburns. In 2002, teaching Pool Cool sun safety lessons was associated with fewer sunburns."

"Healthy sun protection behaviors among one's peers will likely have a positive influence on an individual's sun safety habits," they conclude. "Furthermore, sun-safe pool policies also foster healthier sun safety behaviors among the staff while they are at work and create a work environment conducive to developing health sun protection habits."

Source: JAMA and Archives Journals

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