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UV photographs of 12-year-olds show skin cancer risk

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Look at a middle school assembly – during their lifetime one in 50 of these kids will develop melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer that kills 48,000 people every year, worldwide. Now look at these kids again – which are at highest risk? You can't tell, but a study recently published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* shows that UV photography might provide important information about risk, not visible to the naked eye. The amount of sun damage in UV photographs taken of a large cohort of 12-year-old's correlated with known melanoma risk factors including freckles, fair skin, red hair and light eye color.

"Primary care physicians could use UV photographs with children and young teens to provide better sun protection counseling," says Ryan Gamble, MD, the study's first author and postdoctoral researcher in the lab of Robert Dellavalle, MD, PhD, MSPH, investigator at the University of Colorado Cancer Center and associate professor of dermatology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

"Before middle school kids think about tanning, we want them to see these pictures," Dellavalle says.

In fact, the power of sunspots seen in UV photographs to motivate sun-guarding behaviors such as avoiding tanning beds, staying out of the midday sun, proper sunscreen use and the use of protective clothing has been known from previous studies.

"But while the photographs make an impression, not much has been known about what the spots in the photographs actually mean," Gamble says. The group is the first to show that the amount of sun damage shown in ultraviolet photographs is correlated with other melanoma risk factors, such as skin color, hair color, eye color and freckles.

"For these children at increased risk, it is even more important to protect themselves from the sun and ultraviolet radiation, " Gamble says.

With UV photographs used to create greater awareness of melanoma and motivate increased use of sun prevention in the high-risk population, "much of the occurrence of the disease and its complications can be prevented," Gamble says.

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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