

May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month

The sun's rays beckon most of us this time of year. After being cooped up all winter we are anxious to be outdoors and enjoying the sunshine. But taking a little caution before you step outside could prevent skin cancer as you age.

"Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States," said Roderick Bremby, Secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. "More than one million skin cancers are diagnosed annually in the United States, with more than 90 percent of those directly related to overexposure to the sun."

Yet, everyone can take some common sense steps to protect themselves from the sun and prevent skin cancer. The Center's for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following skin protection options:

- Rub on sunscreen to protect exposed skin, even in cloudy weather. Choose a sunscreen and a lip balm with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.
- Use sunglasses that block as close to 100 percent of both UVA and UVB rays from the sun to protect the eyes and prevent cataracts later in life.
- Wear a hat that shades your face, ears, scalp and neck.
- Cover up with clothing that has a tight weave to protect from the sun's rays.
- Seek shade when you are outside, under a tree, beach umbrella, tent or other shelter.
- Avoid exposure to the sun between the peak hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

One in five Americans including one in three Caucasians will develop skin cancer in the course of their lifetime. Children are especially vulnerable to the sun's damaging

rays and one blistering sunburn in childhood more than doubles a person's chances of developing melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, later in life.

Skin cancer is the classified in three basic types, basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma. In Kansas, 513 new cases of melanoma were diagnosed in Kansas in 2005 and 93 people died of the disease.

More than 80 percent of all skin cancers are the most common type, basal cell. This type of cancer has tripled in U.S. women under age 40 in the last 30 years. Squamous cell skin cancer will be diagnosed in 250,000 Americans each year. Melanoma will account for more than 62,000 cases of skin cancer in 2006 and of the 10,700 skin cancer deaths each year in America, nearly 8,000 will result from this type of cancer.

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