

Summer shines spotlight on skin cancer risks, prevention

The arrival of summer not only triggers barbecues and beach volleyball, it also brings skin care warnings from a variety of health organizations. Once again, these public health groups and medical associations are releasing reports on the dangers of sun exposure and offering studies that point to sensible preventive measures.

For instance, the Skin Cancer Foundation recently supported a study that determined that approximately 90% of skin cancers could be prevented by sun-protective practices. Researchers asked participants to fill out a questionnaire and keep a daily record of sun exposure. They found that the diaries provided more accurate information about behavior than did the questionnaires.

The foundation recommended self-monitoring as a way to increase people's awareness of their sun exposure and help them determine what they are doing wrong. Many participants in the study altered their habits as a result of

this trial, avoiding the sun during peak hours, wearing sun-protective clothing, and regularly applying a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or greater.

The Skin Cancer Foundation offers Australia as a prime example of the success that can be achieved through preventive measures. Fifteen years ago, the country suffered the world's highest incidence of malignant melanoma and other skin cancers. Thanks to educational efforts and marketing campaigns, fewer Australians think tans are desirable, and the rate of melanoma deaths among 30-year-olds (who were children when the campaign began) has plummeted below the level it was 20 years ago. Australia recently instituted a sun-protective rating standard for fabrics. The rating tells consumers how effectively a fabric will shield them from the sun. The ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) rates range from 15 to 50 and are determined by the weave of a fabric and its color.

The American Academy of Pediatrics



has also reported that sun-safety education efforts aimed directly at children work more effectively than do those that educate them solely through their parents. A study conducted by the San Diego School of Medicine and the Veterans Administration Medical Center in San Diego determined that children's knowledge of sun safety increased after reviewing sun-safety picture books, with children scoring 40% higher on sun-safety tests after reviewing the book.

Manufacturers are obviously interested in this trend. A couple of years ago, Schering-Plough HealthCare Products, maker of Coppertone, was instrumental in establishing a daily UV Index for the nation.

The attention that has been given to sun safety has also resulted in a plethora of products. Popular sunscreen and sun block lines have added many interesting SKUs, which cater to the special needs of children, athletes, those with sensitive skin, and so on. The self-tanner market has also experienced a boom as a result of people looking for a bronzed look without the risks of sun exposure.

Furthermore, sun care brands have become more interested in skin care, introducing products that protect and moisturize the skin in a variety of ways. One example is Hawaiian Tropic BioShield Facial Sunblock, which combines SPF 15 with an alpha-hydroxy complex. Another is Coppertone's new Skin Selects line for dry, sensitive, or oily skin. Other companies have introduced kits that help people monitor skin growths that could be related to sun exposure. The HealthCheck product line by Technical Chemicals & Products/Health-Mark Diagnostics offers a Skin Growth Monitoring Kit.

As media attention and educational efforts increase, drugstores are sure to see more products devoted to this health-care category. As health-care professionals working closely with their communities, pharmacists can surely play a role in skin cancer prevention.

Karyn Snyder

Some animals, too, need sun care

When an albino gray kangaroo, called Mulali, was recently born at the San Francisco Zoo, her keepers were concerned that her fair skin could burn in the sun. "In my research of albino kangaroos in other institutions, I found that most of the animals did not require sunscreen because they generally seek shade. However, our 'roos do not feel the need to seek shade when it's foggy—even though they can burn in fog—and rarely seek shade when it's sunny because it's not too hot," said animal keeper Chris Willers.

In order to protect this baby kangaroo (also known as a joey), Willers and other staff members came up with a creative solution: regular application of Banana Boat for Babies SPF 50.

Zookeepers have been applying sunscreen to Mulali's delicate pink ears. She requires three tubes of sunblock each week, but cost is not a problem for the zoo. Banana Boat, based in Westport, Conn., has shipped a year's supply of the sunblock for Mulali's use.

"We were pleasantly surprised when we heard the San Francisco Zoo was using our product on Mulali. We strive to educate moms and children about safe sun practices, and we hope Mulali will help remind children to use sun protection daily while they have fun in the sun," said Kay Lappin, a spokeswoman for Banana Boat.

