

Protect family from sun's rays when outdoors

My teenage daughter is gearing up for summer and is already talking about wanting a deep tan this year. Is tanning considered safe?

Ask anyone suffering from skin cancer: Tanning is a bad idea. According to the American Cancer Society, overexposure to sunlight and other forms of ultraviolet (UV) radiation is thought to be the major risk factor not only for basal and squamous cell skin cancers, but for the more serious melanoma, as well.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer, with one in five Americans developing skin cancer at some point in their lifetime. While the vast majority of these are basal cell skin cancer — the least dangerous — the number of melanomas are on the rise. The American Cancer Society estimates that more than 62,000 people will be diagnosed with melanoma this year. More than a million Americans are diagnosed with some type of skin cancer each year, and more than 10,000 die.

Even though cancer usually doesn't develop until later in life, skin damage from sun overexposure builds up over time, and once damage occurs, it can't be reversed. In fact, experts say the most serious and lasting damage occurs before age 18.

The sun emits three types of ultraviolet rays: UVA, UVB and UVC. UVC isn't a problem — it's absorbed by the ozone layer in the Earth's atmosphere. But UVB rays cause sunburn as well as skin cancer and premature aging of skin. UVA rays stimulate tanning but are also linked with other problems such as cataracts and other eye problems, premature



aging of skin, wrinkling, loss of skin elasticity, skin rashes, and allergic or other reactions to drugs. UVA and UVB are both designated as causes of skin cancer by the National Institutes of Health.

Everyone is encouraged to protect themselves from these rays by using a sunscreen with an SPF (sun-protection factor) of at least 15, or 30 if you have fair skin, which is more susceptible to the harmful effects of UV rays. At the very least, wear a hat and sunglasses when you're out in the sun.

Tanning beds also give off UV rays, and a 2006 study in the *International Journal of Cancer* found a strong association between the use of tanning beds and the risk of developing melanoma. Still, nearly 2.3 million American teenagers visit tanning salons every year.

Make sure your daughter understands the facts before she starts working on her tan this year. More information is available from three Ohio State University Extension fact sheets: "Sun Exposure: Precautions and Protection," online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/5550.html>; "Skin Cancer: Are You At Risk?," online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/aex-fact/0694.html>; and "Ultraviolet Radiation," online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/cd-fact/0199.html>. In addition, the American Cancer Society (<http://www.cancer.org>) and the Skin Cancer Foundation (<http://www.skincancer.org>) offer more detailed information.

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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Pat Brinkman, family and consumer sciences and community development educator for OSU Extension in Fayette County. This column drew much information from the OSU Extension fact sheet, "Sun Exposure: Precautions and Protection," which Brinkman recently updated.

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