



The New Jersey Poison Information & Education System  
Serving New Jersey Since 1983



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Sunscreen Season Is Here

-- Safety Tips for Skin Protection from Damaging UV Rays and for Sunscreen Storage --

Steven Marcus, Executive and Medical Director,  
New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES) *Available for Interviews*

**NEWARK, N.J. — June 14, 2010** — Beach and pool weather is here, and after a winter of cold temperatures and plenty of snow most of us are anxious to bask in the sunlight. Before visiting some of the 127 miles of beaches in New Jersey, taking a dip in a swimming pool or doing yard work, it is important to take some precautions in order to be safe from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays, which are the cause of many skin issues including skin cancer.

According to The Skin Cancer Foundation, skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S., with more than 3.5 million cases in 2 million people diagnosed annually. <sup>1</sup> That means that one in five Americans will develop some form of skin cancer in their lifetime. "Strong evidence of skin cancer risks as the result of sunbathing is staggering," says Dr. Steven Marcus, executive and medical director of NJPIES. "In addition to that concern there is the fact that sunscreens, when misused, can be toxic and should be kept out of the reach of children."

Based on data from NJPIES, unintentional exposures to sunscreen can be a problem. There were 383 cases reported in 2008 and 384 in 2009. In New Jersey, 92 percent of reactions to sunscreens were in young people aged 12 and younger. "Sunbathing is not a good idea, but if you are going to be exposed to the sun, protect yourself; but keep sunblock out of children's reach and store it properly," notes Dr. Marcus. Most of the problematic exposures occurred from sunscreen in the eye, producing irritation and pain. Despite the irritation and pain, and contrary to some urban legends, these effects are short-lived and are unlikely to produce blindness.

With so many choices of sunscreens and so many different claims of effectiveness, from water-resistant

sunscreens to SPF 50 to broad-spectrum protection, finding the sunscreen that will best protect your skin type can be a challenge. "The best sunscreen according to most dermatologists is zinc or titanium oxide, which is found in some of the commercial products," adds Dr. Marcus.

For 30 years, The Skin Cancer Foundation has recommended always using a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher as one important part of a complete sun protection regimen that includes seeking the shade and covering up with clothing.<sup>2</sup>

This time of year stores are stocked full of sunscreens claiming various SPF levels that are supposed to indicate their effectiveness at protecting the skin from the sun's rays. According to researchers at the Environmental Working Group (EWG), the white goop, creams and ointments might prevent sunburn, but don't count on them to keep the UV light from destroying skin cells and causing tumors and lesions. In the EWG's fourth annual report released in May 2010, only 39 of the 500 sunblock products examined were effective and safe to use.<sup>3</sup>

The Skin Cancer Foundation offers the following advice about sun exposure:

- Type 1 and Type 2 people — those with fair complexions, freckles, and red or blond hair, who always burn instead of tan — are at highest risk for skin cancer. This group should wear SPF 30 or more and clothing with a UPF rating of 30 or higher. It is also important to seek shade whenever out in the sun.
- Type 3 and Type 4 people — those with medium complexions, who tend to seldom burn and/or tan easily — are still at risk for skin cancer. This group should wear SPF 15+ and seek the shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Type 5 and Type 6 people with naturally brown or black skin are at a lower risk, but can still develop melanoma. This group should wear SPF 15 outside and seek the shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Being forewarned and aware of the safety precautions is important. Health practitioners are not saying to totally avoid the sun, but to be smart and take a break to seek the shade. Their advice is to enjoy outdoor activities but be protected — for example, go to the beach, but sit under an umbrella.<sup>4</sup>

Some medications may increase the risk of sunburn, so anyone on any medication should check with their physician or pharmacist, or with staff at NJPIES, to determine if there is such a risk.

### **Call to Action**

NJPIES leaders urge medical professionals, parents, educators, caregivers and the general public to call the toll-free poison center hotline, 800-222-1222, for further information.

### **About NJPIES**

As New Jersey's only poison control center, the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System provides information on poison prevention and treatments. Chartered in 1983, NJPIES provides free consultation through telephone hotline services and the Web. Medical professionals such as physicians, registered nurses and pharmacists offer confidential advice regarding poison emergencies and provide information on poison prevention, drugs, food poisoning, animal bites and more. These specialists are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

NJPIES coordinates state poison education and research and is designated as the regional poison center by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services and the American Association of Poison Control Centers. It tracks incidences of adverse reactions to food, drugs and vaccines in order to monitor potential public health issues and provide data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A division of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health of the New Jersey Medical School of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, its state-of-the-art center is located on the school's Newark campus.

New Jersey residents seeking immediate information about treating poison emergencies, and those with any drug information questions, should call the toll-free hotline, **800-222-1222**, anytime. The hearing impaired may call **973-926-8008**. For more information, visit [www.njpies.org](http://www.njpies.org) or call **973-972-9280**.

### **About UMDNJ**

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey is the nation's largest freestanding public health sciences university, with more than 5,500 students attending. The state's three medical schools, a dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health-related professions, a school of nursing and a school of public health are housed on five campuses — Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden and Stratford. Annually, there are more than 2 million patient visits at UMDNJ facilities and faculty practices at the campuses. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a level I trauma center in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a mental health and addiction services network.

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### **Cited Sources:**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.skincancer.org/Skin-Cancer-Facts/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.skincancer.org/Sunscreen/>

<sup>3</sup> Study: Many Sunscreens May Be Accelerating Cancer; Andrew Schneider, Senior Public Health Correspondent; AOL News, May 24, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703465204575208011470022100.html>; Sun-Kissed or Sunburned?; Melinda Beck; The Wall Street Journal, April 26, 2010.