



Preventing Skin Cancer—One Child at a Time

BY DEBORAH J. CORNWALL

Don't be fooled by the drop in temperature. The dangers of too much sun exposure exist all year round. Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from sunlight and from indoor tanning beds is the primary cause of melanoma, a preventable but potentially fatal form of skin cancer. When recognized early, melanoma is highly curable, but more advanced stages are difficult and sometimes impossible to treat and account for 90 percent of skin cancer deaths.

The Children's Melanoma Prevention Foundation (CMPP), based in Norwell, aims to curb cases of skin cancer by educating the public and advocating for better UV protection starting at a young age. Founded in 2003 by Hingham resident Maryellen Maguire-Eisen RN, MSN, the organization partners with community leaders to bring their signature SunAWARE program to area schools, sailing centers, daycare centers, health clubs and community events.

Although rare, cases of childhood melanoma have been on the rise for the past three decades, with children living in northern states being diagnosed at much higher rates. While the condition usually develops over a long period of time, young women who have indoor tanned are now being diagnosed within years rather than decades. Over 70 percent of pediatric melanoma cases occur in girls between the ages of 15 and 19, and it is now the most common cancer diagnosed in white females, ages 20-24. Recognizing the appeal and risks of indoor tanning facilities and the increase in melanoma rates among young women, CMPP urged Massachusetts legislators to ban minors from indoor tanning. This year Gov. Charlie Baker signed into law a ban to protect children from using indoor tanning salons.

The foundation recently teamed up with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to develop a program for Boston Harbor Island staff, campers and visitors to Spectacle and George's islands. The program will kick-off with staff training in spring, 2017. For more information, visit melanomaprevention.org.

How to be SunAWARE

- Avoid unprotected exposure to sunlight and never use indoor tanning equipment.
- Wear sun protective clothing (long-sleeves, long pants, wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses) year-round.
- Apply recommended amounts of broad spectrum sunscreen with a sunburn protection factor (SPF) greater than 30 to all exposed skin every two hours.
- Routinely examine your whole body for skin changes, and report them to a parent or healthcare provider.
- Educate your family and community about how to be SunAWARE.

SunAWARE classes, health fairs, assemblies, field days, and professional development for students, teachers, nurses, and administrators are offered free throughout Massachusetts.

