June is National Skin Cancer Awareness Month!

**KEEP YOUR FAMILY SUN SAFE**

Much has been said and written lately on the subject of sunscreen - why it is important, which one is best, how it should be applied, etc. The number of products on the market is daunting and labeling is often inadequate and confusing.

One organization committed to addressing the need for correct information about sunscreens as well as other forms of sun protection is the Children's Melanoma Prevention Foundation (CMPF). Using their program, SunAWARE, CMPF educates children and young adults about ultraviolet radiation, skin sensitivity, and the five action steps represented in the acronym, AWARE. The proper use of sunscreen is addressed in "A - Apply recommended amounts of broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sunburn protection factor (SPF) >30 to all exposed skin and reapply every two hours or as needed."

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) considers sunscreen an "over-the-counter" medication and provides guidance in its use. Despite this, CMPF educators have found over their eight years of teaching that almost no children and very few adults fully understand how to properly use sunscreen. The number of cases of serious sunburns nationally suggests that consumers, even those who insist they applied sunscreen, are still misunderstanding the message.

There are seventeen approved sunscreens in the US available in creams, lotions, powders, sprays, and sticks. Zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are considered best for children because they provide superior UV protection and are not absorbed through the skin, although they should not be used on broken skin, including the lips. Spray sunscreens are popular but have their own health risks. They should not be sprayed around the face because ingredients may be inhaled.

Proper use of sunscreen includes using a SPF ≥30, applying adequate coverage, and reapplying every two hours, and after swimming, perspiring, or towel drying. SPF 30 sunscreen blocks 97% of UVB, the burning rays when applied in adequate doses i.e. one ounce per application. Simply stated, a handful of sunscreen is the adequate dose to cover the entire body. A "water-resistant" claim indicates that the sunscreen maintains its protection for up to 40 minutes of water submersion. A "very water-resistant" claim indicates protection for 80 minutes. At this time, there is no rating system in the United States for UVA (tanning rays) protection although some products have begun to use a 4-star rating system approved in your Europe and Asia. Even the term "broad-spectrum" does not indicate full protection.

While sunscreen is the preferred method of sun protection for most Americans, CMPF's first recommendation is to avoid unprotected exposure to sunlight and secondly, to wear sun protective clothing. This includes wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts, pants, and sunglasses.

CMPF executive director, Maryellen Maguire-Eisen states "children need to be able to play outdoors safely. We hope that we are teaching them how to do this through our SunAWARE program. But ultimately, it is the responsibility of parents and caretakers to make sure their children have proper sun protection to prevent sunburns and reduce the risk of skin cancer."

Be Safe. Be SunAWARE!

**A - Avoid unprotected exposure to sunlight, seek shade, and never indoor tan.**

**W - Wear sun protective clothing, including a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses year-round.**

**A - Apply recommended amounts of broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sunburn protection factor (SPF) ≥30 to all exposed skin and reapply every two hours, or as needed.**

**R - Routinely examine your whole body for changes in your skin and report concerns to a parent or healthcare provider.**

**E - Educate your family and community about the need to be SunAWARE.**

For more information: Visit [http://www.melanomaprevention.org](http://www.melanomaprevention.org)