

making a habit of protecting your skin

Living in the Rocky Mountain region affords locals with many enjoyable outdoor activities. But with this commodity can come health risks that can be avoided.

At 5,280 feet above sea level in Denver, Colorado residents are exposed to higher levels of harmful sunrays. While some minorities believe that because of their darker skin tone that they are not able to get skin cancer, recent studies suggest that in a little over ten years, the number of Latinos diagnosed with melanoma increased by 32.4 percent, this according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.

Although skin cancer diagnosis is lower among people of color, they are more likely to die from it because of delayed treatment due to late detection. "They may have a slightly lesser risk due to their pigmentation (but) they certainly do have risk," said **Dr. Michael McCracken, M.D., an ophthalmologist with the McCracken Eye and Face Institute, assistant clinical professor at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center and a member of the Skin Cancer Foundation.** "A lot of melanoma in U.S. Latinos is in the rise." However, **Dr. McCracken** also said that many Latinos are beginning to apply sunscreen.

There are several reasons attributed to skin cancer development, but the number one reason is too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. One of the easiest and least expensive ways to protect your skin from sunrays is to apply sunscreen properly; the sunscreen can actually absorb about 93 percent of the sun's rays.

As simple as it may appear, for many, lathering on sunscreen may seem like a chore. Although it may be a challenge to try to get more people to practice basic skin protection safety, some experts are encouraging people to create a routine.

"Obviously (people) need a sunscreen that has an SPF15 or higher." **Dr. McCracken** also said, "if (people) are swimming, sweating or drying off with a towel, they need to reapply." When people do apply sunscreen, they often forget about their

hands, feet and ears. "Also, newborns should be kept out of the sun," he said, "babies over six months should have sunscreen applied."

A preventative way of averting skin cancer for those looking to achieve a summer glow are tanning sprays as an alternative to tanning beds, which can be just as dangerous as exposure to UV rays. "Well, tanning beds have many times the UV radiation exposure than the sun does. They are not only associated with (burns), but premature aging. Recent studies found that people who use tanning beds in their 20's and teens have a 75 percent increase in melanoma risk," said **Dr. McCracken.**

The Skin Cancer Foundation suggests that while sunglasses are usually thought to be representative of today's modern fashion, they too can help to prevent a not so well known, but just as debilitating skin cancer. Eyelid cancer only accounts for a small percentage of all skin cancers, according to the organization, but it can spread along the surrounding area and cause blindness.

The summer season may be coming to an end, but participating in outdoor winter sports and activities still requires the same diligence in avoiding skin cancer.



"UV exposure continues regardless of temperature. In the Mile High City we're already looking at 40 to 50 percent of higher radiation," he said. "The snow reflects about 80 percent of UV radiation," he continued. He recommended the use of lip balm and also wearing sunglasses even though it may be cloudy outside.

Dr. McCracken provided some tips as to the best ways to avoid getting skin cancer saying, "Well, first of all (people) should seek the shade. Avoid tanning and tanning booths. Avoid burning. It's important to wear sunscreen," he said. He also suggested wearing wide brim hats to help protect your ears and the back of the your neck and encouraged annual skin cancer screenings.
- Bertha Velasquez

For more information, please visit:
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