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SUNSCREEN USE DOWN AS SKIN CANCER RATES INCREASE
New Survey Shows Americans Falling Short on Sun Protection

Alexandria, Virginia – Over the past year, the number of Americans using sunscreen, a primary protector against skin cancer, has declined. At the same time, more Americans, including children, are being diagnosed with skin cancer than ever before. A new survey released today by the nonprofit Sun Safety Alliance, which is launching the first annual Sun Safety Week (June 5 – 11), shows a 12-point decline in the percentage of Americans who report using sunscreen when outdoors, from 72 percent to 60 percent.

The survey findings also show that large percentages of individuals are not following other recommended precautions, such as covering exposed skin (56 percent), staying in the shade (48 percent) and wearing a hat (45 percent).

U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H. joined the Sun Safety Alliance in marking the first annual Sun Safety Week as part of the 2005 agenda of the Office of the Surgeon General, “The Year of the Healthy Child.”

“Skin cancer is increasingly striking younger people, especially those in their 20s and 30s,” said Dr. Carmona. “One blistering sunburn in childhood can double a child’s risk of developing skin cancer later in life. Parents must be diligent about protecting their children and themselves in the sun and establishing year-round safe sun practices - including staying inside during midday when the sun is the hottest, wearing a hat and sunglasses when outside, and applying sunscreen frequently – SPF 15 or higher for adults and SPF 30 or higher for kids.”

While the vast majority of adults (85 percent) say they know the dangers of overexposure to the sun and believe skin cancer is a serious issue (91 percent), one in seven (14 percent) volunteer that they do nothing to protect themselves in the sun. When asked why, one in three adults (35 percent) claim they simply forget.

“These numbers clearly indicate that public awareness is not translating into action,” said Phillip Schneider, executive director of the Sun Safety Alliance.

The number of skin cancer cases in the United States, estimated to be 1.3 million this year, exceeds the total number of breast, lung, prostate and colon cancer cases combined. Overexposure to UV radiation from the sun, which has been classified as a carcinogen by the U.S. government, is the number one cause

of skin damage that leads to skin cancer. Most people do not realize that skin cancer can be deadly, with one person dying every hour.

“Growing up in California, I spent a lot of time outdoors without any sunscreen. I wanted to get tan. I thought it looked healthy,” said Brandi Donaldson, a skin cancer survivor. “When I was diagnosed with melanoma at 25, I couldn’t believe it. I thought skin cancer was something that only happened to older people. I was lucky. Now I don’t think twice about applying sunscreen every morning before leaving the house—it’s routine for me.”

“Motivating people to change their behavior is the key. This year’s sun safety survey demonstrates Americans know that sun exposure without protection can lead to skin cancer. But Americans are not incorporating protection from the sun into their daily outdoor routines,” said Schneider of the Sun Safety Alliance. “That’s why we’re launching Sun Safety Week, to focus people’s attention on the simple actions they can take to make sun safety a part of their everyday activities, like brushing their teeth.”

To further rally the public around the practice and promotion of safe sun habits, the Sun Safety Alliance, in partnership with the Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation, is encouraging people to join its Mothers & Others Against Skin Cancer initiative. This effort is designed to mobilize a million mothers and others in communities nationwide to embrace sun safety practices with their families and volunteer to promote sun safety in their communities. Membership is free at www.sunsafetyalliance.org.

Corporate America is also lending its voice to help raise awareness about sun safety issues and promote safe sun habits. The Disney Radio Network will be airing a sun safety jingle it created along with sun safety tips for kids during the months of June and July. Gerber Products Company is sending sun safety tip cards to more than 4 million mothers this month. Wal-Mart will promote the Mothers & Others initiative and conduct in-store sun safety activities this summer. Coppertone will help support expansion of the Mothers & Others program nationally.

The survey was conducted by Harris Interactive[®] for the Sun Safety Alliance[™] of a nationwide sample of 1,000 adults aged 18 and over interviewed by telephone from May 6 - 9, 2005. Figures for age, sex, race and region were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. The margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.

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The Sun Safety Alliance[™] (SSA) is supported by educational grants from the National Association of Chain Drug Stores, Coppertone Skincare Products, Eastman Kodak and DisneyHand, the worldwide outreach program for The Walt Disney Company. More information is available at www.sunsafetyalliance.org