



CONTACT INFORMATION:

Kasey Pickett/Kuleni Gebisa
Fleishman-Hillard
212-453-2000

New Coalition Launches Crusade Against Skin Cancer Caused by Sun Exposure

*The Sun Safety AllianceSM Aims to Reach 10 Million Children in 3 Years;
Urges Policies to Permit Sunscreen Use in Schools*

Washington, D.C. – April 22, 2003 – With skin cancer claiming one life every hour in the U.S., the Sun Safety Alliance, a new non-profit coalition, launched today a national educational campaign to reach millions of children. Just one bad, blistering sunburn in childhood can double the risk of skin cancer later in life and incidental sun exposure, such as recess play, can add up to long-term skin damage. Only one out of 50 states – California – mandates that public schools allow students to self-apply sunscreen without a physician's note, and fewer than four percent of schools have a sun safety policy. Now considered an epidemic, skin cancer incidence grows at six percent each year.

Recognizing that 80 percent of lifetime sun exposure occurs before the age of 18, the newly formed Sun Safety Alliance will push for greater education in schools and at home to ensure children have access to adequate sun protection at all times. Typical American sun safe behavior is focused primarily at the beach or the pool, and only during summer months. And according to a recent study published in the *Archives of Dermatology*, 84 percent of principals said students are outdoors during the midday hours on a given school day, when the sun's harmful rays are strongest. The study also noted that organizational barriers and lack of awareness are the primary reasons why so few schools currently have a sun safety policy.

Protecting children from skin cancer is the unifying focus of the Sun Safety Alliance, a non-profit coalition of community pharmacists, health professional groups and Fortune 500 companies. This focus is particularly important since children get three times as much sun exposure than adults. It is estimated that a child born in 2000 has a one in 75 likelihood of developing invasive malignant melanoma, a dramatic increase from 1980 when there was a one in 250 likelihood, and from 1930 when there was a one in 1500 likelihood.

“A relentless focus on educating children about sun safety is the only way to change generations of behavior and ultimately reduce the rates of skin cancer,” said David J. Leffell, M.D., Professor of Dermatology and Surgery at the Yale School of Medicine, and medical spokesperson for the Sun Safety Alliance. “This requires the commitment, cooperation and determination of parents, schools and health professionals.”

Alliance members point to recently-passed legislation in California, “Billy's Bill for Sun Safety”, initiated by the William S. Graham Foundation for Melanoma Research, Inc., as a model for change in other states. The bill overturned barriers that prevented children from wearing sun protective clothing while outdoors during the school day, and also allowed for sunscreen application without a physician's note or prescription. Sixty-eight percent of Moms responding to a recent survey did not know what the sunscreen policy was in most U.S. schools.

Sun Safety Alliance Responds to CDC Call-to-Action

In 2002, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued guidelines calling for school-based skin cancer education programs. In January 2003, the Sun Safety Alliance and Scholastic Inc. produced *Block the Sun, Not the Fun!*®, a science and literacy curriculum that will reach 150,000 teachers and 4.5 million second, third and fourth-grade students and their families this year alone. The curriculum teaches sun safety through health, science, and language arts modules such as a letter writing exercise to President George W. Bush. Educators are encouraged to extend the program to families and communities through a “Sun Safety Day,” the best of which is eligible for a \$5,000 grant from the Sun Safety Alliance.

“The positive response from teachers and kids to *Block the Sun, Not the Fun* in just a short time is encouraging, but we have a long way to go,” said Phil Schneider, Executive Director of the Sun Safety Alliance. “As a national organization dedicated solely to changing public attitudes and behaviors about UV exposure, the Alliance is determined to remove obstacles to effective sun safety, help people take action and make a dramatic difference in the long-term health of this nation’s children and families.”

Research Guides Alliance Agenda

The Sun Safety Alliance conducted research to understand awareness of the risks and consequences of sun over-exposure, and the use of preventative actions to minimize these risks. Respondents to the survey included 300 mothers of children between the ages of 5 and 10 and 300 children ages 6 to 10. The research, completed in July 2002, found that:

- Only one-third of kids reported seeing or hearing anything about sun safety during the prior few months.
- Sixty-eight percent of kids were not aware that a bad sunburn increases their chance of developing skin cancer when they get older.
- Moms and children don’t protect themselves with sunscreen as frequently at non-water outdoor locations as compared to when they are at the lake, beach or pool.

In addition to the school-based program, the Alliance will focus on educating health professionals and communicating through retail channels to ensure children and families are reached at various cross-points. More than 100,000 pharmacists, and more than 34,000 drug stores and pharmacies, will be provided with materials to help further the mission of eliminating skin cancer due to sun exposure.

The Sun Safety Alliance

The Sun Safety Alliance is a non-profit coalition with the mission to significantly reduce the incidence of skin cancer in the U.S. through a consumer education program that motivates behavioral change in adopting and practicing proper sun protection, especially for young children. The Sun Safety Alliance was founded by the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) and the maker of Coppertone® Suncare Products. Alliance members include The Walt Disney Company and DisneyHand, Roche Vitamins, and the National Safe Kids Coalition. Participating health professional organizations include the MD Anderson Cancer Center, the Skin Cancer Foundation, the American Academy of Dermatology, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. For a complete list of Alliance members, visit www.sunsafetyalliance.org.

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