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Americans Get Failing Grade in Practicing Sun Safety Beyond Beach or Pool

Few Understand, Follow UV Index, SPF Guidelines

Alexandria, VA- June 21, 2004-- On the first day of summer, the first ever national report card on the public's overall knowledge of skin cancer and individual sun safety practices gives Americans a failing grade, according to results of a national survey released today by the non-profit Sun Safety Alliance.

"While the bad news is skin cancer kills, the good news is skin cancer is largely preventable. It's a disease that has been taken too lightly for too long. To stem this epidemic, it is critical that families adopt sun protection beyond spring and summer, to include year-round use of sunscreen, sun glasses, and hats as standard family outdoor recreational equipment," said Phillip L. Schneider, Executive Director of the Sun Safety Alliance.

With current incidence rates, it is estimated that more than two new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed on average every minute. By annually issuing a national report card, on the first day of summer, the Sun Safety Alliance hopes to put this issue on the radar screen of all Americans.

"What we found was that awareness of the dangers of overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet radiation is not translating to the behavior changes necessary to reduce the increasing epidemic of skin cancer," Schneider said.

Overexposure to the sun's UV radiation is the leading cause of skin cancer. Incidence rates of skin cancer are increasing faster than any other type of cancer, with over 1.3 million new cases expected this year.

Skin Cancer is like 'Silent Epidemic'

"Like a silent epidemic, one person dies on average every hour from skin cancer," notes Dr. David J. Leffell, Professor of Dermatology at the Yale School of Medicine and author of "Total Skin: The Definitive Guide to Whole Skin Care for Life."

"Contrary to the notion that a tan is healthy, a tan is a strong signal that your skin has been damaged," said Dr. Leffell. "What most parents don't know is the fact that a serious sunburn in childhood can trigger skin cancer later in life. This doesn't have to be the case if we learn and practice sun safe behavior whenever we enjoy outdoor activities."

While most Americans know that sun safety procedures, such as applying sunscreen, wearing sunglasses, seeking shade and wearing a hat should be

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practices at the pool or beach, they get a failing grade in following those same practices in general when involved in other outside activities.

Americans earn a “D” on the UV Index and SPF system

The Sun Safety Alliance’s Report Card survey, conducted by Harris Interactive, found Americans also had failing grades on two key knowledge areas that can help protect them and their families from overexposure to the sun’s UV radiation.

Only slightly more than half of those surveyed (58%) expressed awareness and knowledge of the UV index, and fewer than four out of 10 (38%) use the UV index to help them determine what sun safety precautions they should take. The UV index measures the intensity of the sun’s UV radiation on a scale of 1-11 at the earth’s surface. The higher the UV index on a given day, the greater the need for sun safety protection.

When it comes to following the SPF (Sun Protection Factor) guidelines, only one out of three (34%) indicated they always follow the guidelines when purchasing sun protection products, and only one out of four (27%) said they “often” follow the guidelines. Combined, the survey results would merit only a “D” on the Sun Safety Awareness National Report Card.

The FDA, the Sun Safety Alliance, American Academy of Dermatology and others recommend that individuals need to use a sunscreen at a minimum 15 SPF level and frequent reapplication as part of their overall sun protection practices.

The Sun Safety Alliance is a non-profit organization launched in April, 2003, and formed to work with others to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of sun safety practices as a means to reduce skin cancer incidence rates. More information is available at www.sunsafetyalliance.org. The SSA was founded by Coppertone and the National Association of Chain Drug Stores.

Methodology

The survey results are based on a nationwide survey of 1,025 adults (aged 18 and over) interviewed by telephone between May 14 and 17, 2004. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, region and income were weighted to reflect population proportions. In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95% certainty that the results have a statistical precision of ± 3 percentage points of what they would be if the total U.S. population of adults had been polled with complete accuracy.

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