

**INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY**  
**Grundy County Extension Education Director**  
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**June 6, 2008**

The warm sunny days of summer encourage more outside activities such as picnics, swimming, fishing, biking, outdoor sports, etc. Many of you have jobs that keep you outside all day. With these outdoor activities, greater exposure to the sun occurs. With that exposure, it is important to take proper precautions to protect your skin to lessen the chance of developing skin cancer. Unprotected skin, exposed to the sun over a period of time increases that risk. Many of us have known someone who has had some form of skin cancer. This article will briefly cover the risk, types, warning signs and what you can do to minimize the risks of skin cancer.

The risk of developing skin cancer appears to be increasing. One in seven people will develop cancer in the United States. Of those who do, one in 100 will be melanoma, which can be fatal. One severe blistering sunburn before the age of 18 doubles your risk, which increases with age. How many of us have had those blistering sunburns? Skin cancer is more common if you are fair or light skinned, have a family history of certain types of moles, or if you spend a lot of time outdoors in the sun.

There are three types of skin cancer: basal cell, which makes up 75 percent of skin cancers; squamous cell, which makes up 20 percent of skin cancers; and melanoma which makes up just 5 percent of all skin cancers but results in 75 percent of all skin cancer deaths. The steady increase in the incidence of melanoma suggests we need to make better use of hats, other clothing, and sunscreen lotions to protect skin from the sun. With early identification and treatment, survival rates increase. Ninety – nine percent of basal cell and squamous cell cancers are curable. The five year survival rate for melanoma, if found early, is 85 percent.

It is important to note any changes in moles in order to detect possible melanoma. Moles that are asymmetric (one half does not match the other), have border irregularity (the outside edges are ragged, notched, or blurred), color variation (the skin pigment is not uniform but has shades of tan, brown, black or red, white, and blue), or have a diameter greater than about ¼ of an inch with sudden or continuing increase in size, should be checked by your doctor.

What can you do to prevent or to detect skin cancer? First, examine your skin carefully front and back in a mirror every 6 – 8 weeks. Take note of any changes in your skin; watch for sores that won't heal, red patches, and changes in size or color of moles. These may be warning signs of skin cancer. Consult your doctor at regular checkups and any time you are in doubt. Use suntan lotion with a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of at least 15 and wear a broad brimmed hat and other clothing to shelter you from the sun.

To learn more about skin cancer and how to reduce your risk for it, contact the Grundy office of ISU Extension and ask for publication PM 1683.