



SEARCH

A to Z Index | Newsroom | Contact Us | FAQs | About OSHA

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OSHA QuickTakes Newsletter

RSS Feeds

Occupational Safety & Health Administration

We Can Help

What's New | Offices

[Home](#) [Workers](#) [Regulations](#) [Enforcement](#)
[Data & Statistics](#)
[Training](#) [Publications](#)
[Newsroom](#)
[Small Business](#)
[Anti-Retaliation](#)

Protecting Yourself in the Sun

Sunlight contains ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which causes premature aging of the skin, wrinkles, cataracts, and skin cancer. The amount of damage from UV exposure depends on the strength of the light, the length of exposure, and whether the skin is protected. There are no safe UV rays or safe suntans.

Skin Cancer

Sun exposure at any age can cause skin cancer. Be especially careful in the sun if you burn easily, spend a lot of time outdoors, or have any of the following physical features:

- Numerous, irregular, or large moles.
- Freckles.
- Fair skin.
- Blond, red, or light brown hair.

Self-Examination

It's important to examine your body monthly because skin cancers detected early can almost always be cured. The most important warning sign is a spot on the skin that is changing in size, shape, or color during a period of 1 month to 1 or 2 years.

Skin cancers often take the following forms:

- Pale, wax-like, pearly nodules.
- Red, scaly, sharply outlined patches.
- Sores that don't heal.
- Small, mole-like growths - melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer.

If you find such unusual skin changes, see a health care professional immediately.

Block Out UV Rays

- **Cover up.** Wear tightly-woven clothing that blocks out light. Try this test: Place your hand between a single layer of the clothing and a light source. If you can see your hand through the fabric, the garment offers little protection.
- **Use sunscreen.** A sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 blocks 93 percent of UV rays. You want to block both UVA and UVB rays to guard against skin cancer. Be sure to follow application directions on the bottle.
- **Wear a hat.** A wide brim hat (not a baseball cap) is ideal because it protects the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp.
- **Wear UV-absorbent shades.** Sunglasses don't have to be expensive, but they should block 99 to 100 percent of UVA and UVB radiation.
- **Limit exposure.** UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. If you're unsure about the sun's intensity, take the shadow test: If your shadow is shorter than you, the sun's rays are the day's strongest.

Preventing Skin Cancer

For more information about preventing, detecting, and treating skin cancer, check out these sources:

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org 1-800-ACS-2345

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/ChooseYourCover 1-888-842-6355

The Skin Cancer Foundation

www.skincancer.org 1-800-SKIN-490

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