

I have a confession to make. Two days after I wrote my last article about sun safety and how to protect yourself from the dangers of too much sun exposure, I spent three days at the beach. Now before you scream “hypocrite” and stop reading my articles, I want you to know that besides actually going out into the sun, I did follow all of the safety tips laid out in my last column.

Sure, avoiding the sun may be the best way to prevent skin cancer, but we all know that it’s not realistic, so I did the next best thing. I limited the time I was exposed to the sun (especially at mid-day) and I applied and re-applied sunscreen often. I didn’t get that golden tan that so many people look for, but I also didn’t get burned or increase my chances of getting the most common form of cancer.

- New incidences of skin cancer are now estimated to exceed 1.3 million cases this year, which represents two new cases diagnosed every minute and one person dying from skin cancer every hour.
- More cases of skin cancer are diagnosed each year than breast, prostate, lung and colon cancer combined.
- One in five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime.
- Skin cancer is a disease that increasingly strikes people at a younger age, especially in their 20s and 30s.

And although a vast majority of adults say they know the dangers of overexposure to the sun and believe skin cancer is a serious issue it’s shocking to find out that

- The use of sunscreen went down by 12% over the past year—from 72% to 60%, with one in seven adults indicating that they do nothing to protect themselves in the sun.
- Only 11% of adults say that they follow all the recommended sun safety guidelines whenever they go outdoors.
- Four out of five adults believe that a suntan is not a sign of good health. However, half of those surveyed still believe that a suntan makes a person look more attractive.
- Six in 10 adults say they know someone who has or had skin cancer.
- Only 26% of adults are aware that one person dies every hour of skin cancer.
- 43% of adults are unfamiliar with the UV Index.

As the temperatures continue to rise, so too should your understanding of this deadly form of cancer. There are three types of skin cancer. Basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma.

Basal cell cancer accounts for more than 90 percent of all skin cancers in the U.S. and is often easily detected with an excellent record for successful treatment. It usually appears as a small, fleshy bump or nodule on the head, neck, or hands. Occasionally, these nodules appear on the trunk of the body, usually as flat growths. Although this type of cancer rarely spreads to other parts of the body, it can extend below the skin to the bone and cause considerable local damage. And, non-melanoma skin cancer places people at

high risk for developing additional skin cancers. It is the most common skin cancer found in Caucasians and people who have light hair, eyes, and complexions. It seldom occurs in dark-skinned persons.

Squamous cell skin cancer (sometimes referred to as non-melanoma carcinoma) may appear as nodules, or as red, scaly patches of skin. It is the second most common skin cancer found in Caucasians, and is usually found on fair-skinned persons. It affects 200,000 persons per year, but has a 95% cure rate when treated properly. Squamous cell carcinoma generally is more aggressive than basal cell and is typically found on the rim of the ear, face, lips and mouth, however, it can spread to other parts of the body.

Melanoma is the most serious type of skin cancer. It begins in skin cells called melanocytes and when people spend time in the sunlight, the melanocytes make more melanin and cause the skin to tan. This also happens when skin is exposed to other forms of ultraviolet light (such as in a tanning booth). If the skin receives too much ultraviolet light, the melanocytes may begin to grow abnormally and become cancerous.

The first sign of melanoma is often a change in the size, shape, or color of a mole. But melanoma can also appear on the body as a new mole. In men, it most often shows up on the upper body, between the shoulders and hips and on the head and neck. In women, it often develops on the lower legs. In dark-skinned people, melanoma often appears under the fingernails or toenails, on the palms of the hands and on the soles of the feet.

Melanoma is a serious and sometimes life-threatening cancer. If it is found and treated in its early stages, the chances of recovery are very good. If it is not found early, it can grow deeper into the skin and spread to other parts of the body and once melanoma has spread to other parts of the body beyond the skin, it is difficult to treat.

Mike DeCinti is the marketing director for Lumberton Radiological Associates. He can be reached at mdecinti@lraxray.com or by calling 738-8222, ext. 258.