

## **PRACTICE SUN SAFETY**

A recently released Boston University study shows that kids are ignoring sun-safety. Tans are still very popular among preteens and adolescents. Public Health is reminding children and their parents that sun-safety is important. The Boston University study, published in the June issue of Pediatrics, surveyed more than 10,000 12 to 18-year-olds in 1999 about their "tan-seeking" behaviors. One-third of the respondents said they used sunscreen routinely. Almost 10 percent reported using tanning beds. Most of them had at least one sunburn the previous summer. Some 50 percent of the respondents with more than one sunburn said that sunburns were just the cost of getting a tan.

Severe sunburns at an early age significantly increase the risk of skin cancer, including melanoma. Melanoma kills, as witnessed this past year by the death of Ronald Reagan's daughter Maureen. It is never too early to begin protecting yourself against sun exposure, but we have to find messages that appeal to teens. Right now, they're opening up copies of popular magazines and seeing young people like themselves with deep brown tans. That sends the absolute wrong message. A tan isn't a sign of health. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

Public Health Officials advise that all people should follow these sun-safety tips:

- Limit outdoor activities between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are strongest. Even shady areas have reflective light.
- Babies less than six months old should not spend much time in the sun. If they do go out they should wear protective clothing, including a hat with a brim and sunglasses that filter harmful UV rays.
- Babies and children over six months old should always wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15. Sunscreen should be applied 30 minutes before children go outside and reapplied every two to three hours when they are in the sun. Sunscreen should be reapplied after water exposure, even if the product is waterproof.
- Pay particularly close attention to nose, lips, ears and backs of hands and feet. Stick sunscreen products with paraffin are good for those areas, because they don't drip and sting eyes.
- Wear protective clothing and hats.

Parents should instill sun-safety into their children at a young age. In addition to protecting their children with sunscreen and limiting exposure, they can also set a good example by practicing sun-safety themselves. Everyone needs to limit their exposure to harmful rays, no matter what their age.