



Monthly Health Watch

News with a Monthly Health Theme

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Summer 2010

Sun safety week reminds parents to protect kids from the sun's harmful rays

By Joseph Dougherty, MD, medical director for Aetna's Northeast Region

Summer is quickly approaching and kids will soon be out of school. Read on to find out what you can do to have a fun and safe summer in the sun.

Did you know that according to the American Academy of Pediatrics about 80 percent of a person's lifetime sun exposure is acquired by age 18? Because sun damage can lead to problems later in life, including skin cancer, now is the best time to protect your children's skin from sun damage and teach them healthy habits that will stay with them for a lifetime. In honor of Sun Safety Week, June 1 – 7, take some time to review sun safety tips to reduce your kids' risk of skin cancer.



Joseph Dougherty, MD

Also in this issue:

- **National Men's Health Week:** Tips for men for leading longer, healthier lives.
- **Product Corner:** Aetna Health ConnectionsSM

Healthy sun tips for kids:

- Before heading outside, make sure kids are wearing sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 15 or higher. Apply 30 minutes before going into the sun. Use a waterproof formula if your kids are going swimming and make sure to reapply when they get out of the water.
- If possible, keep kids out of direct sunlight during peak sun hours, between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. These are the hours the

sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays are at their strongest, so it's especially important to protect skin during this time. If you must be in the sun, make sure kids have on sun block and protective clothing and hats.

- Encourage older kids to wear sunglasses. Sunglasses can be cool, and they can also protect eyes from exposure to UV rays. Limiting long-term sun exposure of the eyes decreases the likelihood of developing cataracts or eye cancer. When buying sunglasses, look for a label guaranteeing 99 percent to 100 percent UV protection.
- Encourage kids to wear a hat to shade their face when they are in direct sun.
- Keep babies aged 6 months or younger out of the sun completely. If shade or protective clothing is not available, apply a small amount of baby sunscreen to exposed areas of skin.
- Make sure your kids drink plenty of water when they're playing outside in the sun.

Did You Know?

- Your chance of absorbing harmful UV radiation depends on several factors: decrease in the ozone layer, the season and the weather. To check what the daily UV index is for your area, visit <http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html>.
- People taking medications such as antibiotics and heart medicine are more sensitive to the sun and should take extra precautions to protect their skin.
- According to the American Cancer Society, more than 2 million skin cancers are diagnosed each year in the United States. That's more than cancers of the prostate, breast, lung, colon, uterus, ovaries and pancreas combined.
- There are three types of UV radiation – UVA, UVB and UVC rays. UVC rays are the most dangerous, but fortunately these rays are blocked by the ozone layer and don't reach the earth.

For more information on sun safety, visit the American Cancer Society Sun Safety [webpage](#).

What about vitamin D?

Recently, there have been conflicting reports about the risks and benefits of sun exposure. Is being in the sun good for you or not? After years of doctors telling us to slather on the sunscreen, several studies^{1,2} have found that there are benefits to limited sun exposure. Our skin produces vitamin D when it comes into contact with the sun's rays. Not getting enough sunlight can lead to vitamin D deficiency, which has recently been linked with a higher incidence of certain types of cancer. Some doctors now recommend that patients try to get about 20 minutes of sun per day on most days in order to get enough vitamin D.

While these studies have some good points, most dermatologists still recommend that we apply sunscreen every day and get vitamin D from foods such as milk, cheese or eggs. To find more ways to get vitamin D in your diet, visit [Aetna IntelliHealth](#).

National Men's Health Week spotlights the need to take an active role in your health care

Did you know that on average, men live six years less than women?

Each year, Men's Health Week, which takes place this year from June 14 to 20, is celebrated around Father's Day to heighten awareness of preventable health problems and encourage screenings for early detection and treatment of disease in men and boys. The message behind Men's Health Week is simple -- leading a healthy lifestyle, exercising more and getting regular medical checkups can have a positive effect on the quality of men's lives – now and in the future.

Fortunately there are a lot of changes that men can make in their lifestyle to lead longer and healthier lives.

Work with your doctor or nurse to stay healthy

- **Go for regular checkups** – One of the most important things you can do is see your doctor on a regular basis – even if you feel fine. Many conditions don't show symptoms in their early stages, but doctors can find them with blood or urine tests. Your primary care physician can also give you tips to lead a healthier lifestyle.
- **Pay attention to signs and symptoms** – Tell your doctor about unusual symptoms such as abnormal thirst, discharge, trouble urinating or shortness of breath. These symptoms could be pointing to an undiagnosed condition such as cancer, a sexually transmitted disease, diabetes or heart disease. Keep in mind that people live longer when these conditions are treated early and that most of these conditions can be prevented with lifestyle changes.

Be informed about your health

- **Learn your family health history** – It's important to know about your family health history because some conditions are hereditary. Did your father have high blood pressure? Did your mother have Type II diabetes? If you and your doctor know whether you are at risk for a certain condition, your doctor can help you take steps to keep you from suffering from the same conditions.

¹ For Some People. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved May 14, 2010, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/01/080107181411.htm>

² Grant WB, Mohr SB. Ecological studies of ultraviolet B, vitamin D and cancer since 2000. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 2009.

- Also think about entering this information into your Personal Health Record (PHR) and sharing it online with your doctor. Aetna's PHR allows members to keep information such as health history, insurance claims, doctor visits and prescribed medications in a secure, password-protected online record.

Know and understand your numbers

- Talk to your doctor about being tested for common conditions such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and hypertension. If any of your results are considered abnormal, you and your doctor should discuss what this means and what you can do to treat it.

What you can do daily to improve your health

- Be sure to get between 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night, eat a healthy, balanced diet and aim to get at least 30 minutes of exercise each day, or 3 ½ hours of exercise per week.

For more information about Men's Health Week, visit <http://www.menshealthmonth.org/week/>.

Find more men's health information on [Aetna IntelliHealth](#).

Product Corner: Spotlight on Aetna Health ConnectionsSM

Aetna Health ConnectionsSM health and wellness resources are specifically targeted to individual health needs. More than 70 health and wellness programs are available, including biometric screenings and lifestyle coaching for weight and tobacco cessation, and disease and case management programs. Members can choose programs that fit their needs and lifestyle. Wellness programs help people to improve their workplace productivity, improve their physical and emotional health and result in lower health care costs. For more information, visit: <http://www.aetna.com/plans-services-health-insurance/detail/health-wellness-plans/wellness-programs.html>