Office of Air and Radiation (6205J) EPA-430-F-09-070 May 2009

facts about: *Skin Cancer*

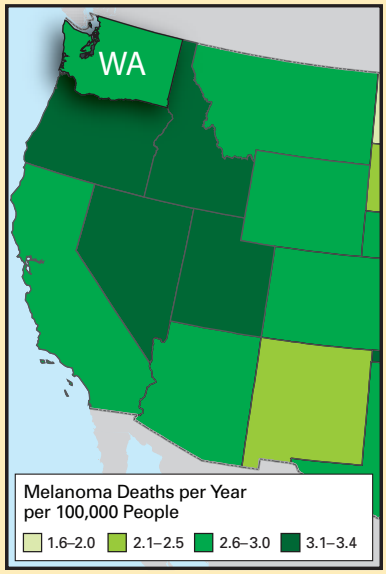
Skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in the United States.[1-4] This fact sheet presents statistics about skin cancer for Washington and the United States as a whole.

just the facts: *Skin Cancer in Washington*

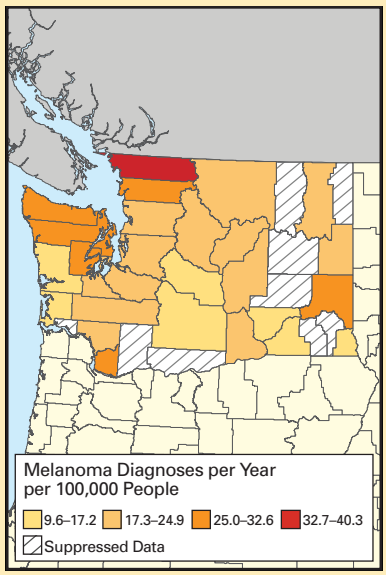
- **Sunburns.** A 2004 survey found that 43.6% of white adults in Washington had at least one sunburn in the past year.[5] Sunburns are a significant risk factor for the development of skin cancer.[6-8]
- **New Cases of Melanoma.** The rate of new melanoma diagnoses—responsible for 75% of all skin cancer deaths—was 35% higher in Washington than the national average from 2001-2005 and was the 5th highest in the U.S.[9,10] An estimated 1,900 state residents were diagnosed with melanoma in 2008.[2]
  - Island County has one of the top 10 rates of new melanoma diagnoses among counties nationwide, 130% above the national average.[11]
- **Deaths from Melanoma.** Approximately 175 people in Washington die of melanoma every year.[12] Washington had the 16th highest melanoma death rate nationally from 2001-2005—7.4% higher than the U.S. average.[13]

[1–42] All references can be found on the SunWise Web site at: www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html

Melanoma Death Rates, 2001–2005[12]
All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages



Annual Rate of New Melanoma Diagnoses, 2001–2005[9]
All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages



survivor story: *Shay Frederickson*

After watching a segment about melanoma on The Oprah Winfrey Show, I became suspicious of a mole on my leg. I'd noticed this mole change color and shape for a year, and as soon as I saw the pictures of melanomas on TV, I called my cousin, who is a dermatologist. He removed the mole and told me it was positive for melanoma.

I felt terrified and sad to hear I had melanoma, but from the beginning I told myself I would not let this disease beat me. I never gave up and never stopped asking my doctors questions, and after three surgeries and high-dose interferon therapy, I have been cancer-free for a year.

When I was first diagnosed, a lot of people's reaction was: "Oh, this is just skin cancer; it's not a big deal." But the 3 weeks I planned to take off from work quickly turned into 7 months: it was a big deal. There is a huge lack of awareness about how serious melanoma can be. Now, I talk about my experience with melanoma whenever I can to help educate people about this disease. Remember to watch for changes in your skin and be your own advocate!

Shay Frederickson, a resident of Renton, WA, works to raise awareness of melanoma.

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facts about: *Skin Cancer*

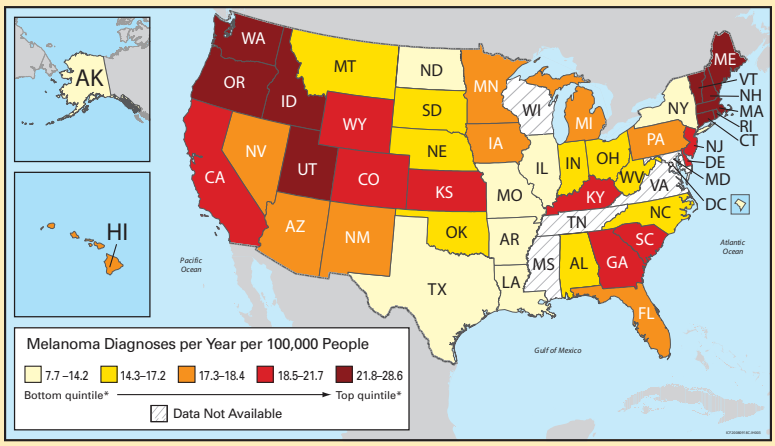
The Cost of Skin Cancer

In the U.S., medical costs to treat skin cancer are estimated at almost $2 billion annually.[14-15]

statistics: *Cause for Concern*

- **In 2008, more than 1 million people were diagnosed with skin cancer, making it the most common of all cancers.**[1-4] More people were diagnosed with skin cancer in 2008 than with breast, prostate, lung, and colon cancer combined.[2] About **1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime.**[17]
- **One American dies of melanoma almost every hour.**[2]
- **Melanoma is the second most common form of cancer for adolescents and young adults (15-29 years old).**[18]
- **For people born in 2005, 1 in 55 will be diagnosed with melanoma**[13]**— nearly 30 times the rate for people born in 1930.**[19]

National Annual Rate of New Melanoma Diagnoses, 2001–2005[16]
All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages, Age-adjusted Rates



* Please note that delays in reporting melanoma cases to cancer registries are more common since they are usually diagnosed and treated in non-hospital settings such as physician offices. States are grouped into quintiles based on rates of melanoma diagnoses. A quintile is a statistical "block" representing 20% of a total. Because data are available for only 45 states and D.C., four quintiles include nine states, and one includes 10. For example, the ten states with the highest melanoma rates—21.8 to 28.6 diagnoses per 100,000 residents every year—are in the top quintile.

what works: *An Ounce of Prevention*

- **Unprotected exposure to ultraviolet light—a known human carcinogen—is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer.**[6,17,20-24] Taking simple steps as early in life as possible can reduce one's risk.[2-4, 25-26]
- **Early detection of melanoma can save one's life.**[27-33] Skin examinations may be the best way to detect skin cancer early.[2, 34-38]
- The CDC found evidence that **education and policy approaches in primary schools (for children) and in recreational or tourism settings (for adults) can improve sun safety behaviors.**[39-40]
- Student self-reported data[41]—collected as part of the U.S. EPA's SunWise Program—showed that **teachers using the SunWise Tool Kit for 1-2 hours yearly can spur increases in students' sun safety knowledge and attitudes and small to modest improvements in short-term sun safety behaviors.**[42]
  - Using the data mentioned above, published modeling results show SunWise teaching between 1999 and 2015 could prevent more than 50 premature deaths and 11,000 future cases of skin cancer, saving the country more than $30 million in medical costs and productivity losses.[42]

[1–42] All references can be found on the SunWise Web site at: www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html

skin cancer prevention: *Action Steps*

- **Do Not Burn.** Overexposure to the sun is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer.
- **Avoid Sun Tanning and Tanning Beds.** UV light from tanning beds and the sun causes skin cancer and wrinkling.
- **Use Sunscreen.** Generously apply a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Reapply at least every two hours, and after swimming or sweating.
- **Cover Up.** Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses with 99-100% UVA/UVB protection, when possible.
- **Seek Shade.** Seek shade when the sun's UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- **Watch for the UV Index.** Pay attention to the UV Index when planning outdoor activities to prevent overexposure to the sun.