

High School Students' Use of Sunscreen and Tanning Beds

[Announcer] *This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Bret Atkins] Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. CDC recommends using sun protection and avoiding indoor tanning to help prevent skin cancer.

I'm Bret Atkins for CDC's journal *Preventing Chronic Disease*. Today, I'm talking with Dr. Corey Basch, assistant professor in the Department of Public Health at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey. She joins us to discuss her study on high school students' use of sunscreen and tanning beds between 2001 and 2011. Dr. Basch's study was featured in an August 2014 issue of *Preventing Chronic Disease*. Thank you for joining us, Dr. Basch.

[Corey Basch] Thanks so much for having me.

[Bret Atkins] Dr. Basch, give us an overview of your study.

[Corey Basch] Sure. We used data from CDC's Youth Behavior Risk Surveillance System, and our aim was to describe the skin protection behaviors among high school students over a ten year period; and as you mentioned, that period was 2001 to 2011. There were two survey items from YRBSS that we focused on. The first one pertained to use of sunscreen and the second pertained to use of indoor tanning devices.

[Bret Atkins] What did you find when looking at the results?

[Corey Basch] Unfortunately, we found a decrease in the overall percentage of respondents who reported wearing sunscreen; and in addition, we haven't seen much of a decline at all in the use of tanning devices. Consistent with the literature, females reported using indoor tanning devices more than males; and when we did look at demographic subgroups, we found that white females were more likely to report using the tanning devices and also the most likely to report the heaviest use, which we characterized as 20 or more visits to a tanning device in one year. It's important also to note that there was a dose response gradient between grade and frequency, with an increase in tanning device use as the youth got older.

[Bret Atkins] Why look at high school students' use specifically?

[Corey Basch] Well, these high school years are important years that can impact future trajectories. High school students are transitioning to making decisions for themselves. This research and other research suggest that adolescents do continue to put themselves at risk, but more importantly, there are opportunities here to intervene.

[Bret Atkins] With increasing amounts of information being disseminated about the harms of unprotected sun exposure, why do you think we're still seeing a decline in sunscreen use among teens?

[Corey Basch] Well, information alone isn't sufficient to motivate or change behavior. There's reason to believe that tanning behaviors are rooted in emotional motivation, such as the desire for physical attractiveness that has been reinforced by the media, and it's also fairly widespread. But there are other factors, too. For example, one could be that the fact that sunscreen is a cost, it's not readily accessible unless you go out of your way to purchase it, and that could be influencing whether it's used or not.

[Bret Atkins] How is this study different from others in the past?

[Corey Basch] This is the first study of its kind to provide a trend analysis for looking at tanning behavior, along with updated information on sunscreen use. And we are using the most recently available YRBSS data across a 10-year period and looking at key demographic subgroups.

[Bret Atkins] In light of the July release of the Surgeon General's Call to Action to reduce skin cancer, how do you think your research can further this effort?

[Corey Basch] Since UV exposure is such a major component in causing skin cancer, reducing UV exposure will then reduce skin cancer risk. So, using sun protective behaviors like sunblock and avoiding intentional exposure to tanning devices would be key. This research provides insight into these specific behaviors in this population over time. Future research should focus on reasons why these particular groups continually seek out exposure to UV radiation by way of the sun or indoor tanning devices as a way to tan the skin for cosmetic reasons. But research alone won't suffice. The approach to tackling this issue will involve dedication from many arenas, ranging from communities to the media. And I believe the real challenge is changing the normative beliefs that artificially tanned skin is desirable and is beautiful skin. Starting with these messages early in childhood and reinforcing them through adolescence is really imperative.

[Bret Atkins] Thank you for joining us, Dr. Basch. You can read her study online at cdc.gov/pcd.

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