



Limiting the Sun, Not the Fun Through the SunWise Program

Public Health Problem

In Arizona, melanoma has increased 150% since 1973, and deaths from melanoma have increased 44%. Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in America, and rates of skin cancer incidence in Arizona are triple the national average. Nationwide, children as young as 11 years old are being diagnosed with deadly skin cancers. Just one blistering sunburn during childhood is estimated to double the risk of getting melanoma later in life, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.

Program Example

Arizona is the first state in the nation to provide a staff person to administer the SunWise program, funded by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant. Presented in both English and Spanish, the SunWise curriculum is free to educators and teaches children in grades K–8 how to protect themselves from overexposure to the sun. The program increases student and teacher awareness of sun protective behaviors through activities such as the statewide poster contest. The goal is to increase students' ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors to further reduce their health risk for overexposure to the sun at home and at school. The program provides children with scientific knowledge and helps them to better understand environmental concepts related to sun protection.

Implications and Impact

More than 400 schools statewide have enrolled in the SunWise program since February 2003, and 12,000 children have completed SunWise activities. Program staff have met with more than 11,000 children to teach sun safety. In addition, extensive partnerships have been created throughout the state, and more than 3,000 students submitted entries in a statewide SunWise poster contest. Measuring the effectiveness of the SunWise program will be a challenge, given the long amount of time between overexposure to the sun and the onset of UV-related health effects; however, changes in children's attitudes and knowledge can be measured. In 2004, the state will release results of an evaluation involving 2,000 Arizona schoolchildren to determine their attitudes about a variety of factors, including sunscreen use, tanning practices, and knowledge of sun protection practices.