



Everything New Orleans

## The Times-Picayune

### **This is season for skin cancer Take precautions to lessen the risks**

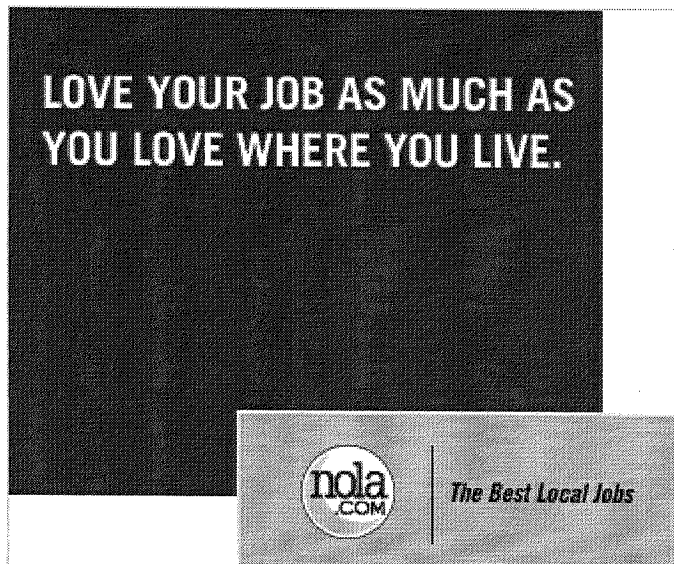
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**Iris Cooper**

With summer temperatures here, the Cancer Association of Greater New Orleans and the American Cancer Society are urging everyone to take precautionary measures to protect themselves from skin cancer.

Both organizations say skin cancer is the most common cancer in America, and an estimated 1 million new cases will be reported each year. Of that group, about 9,300 people will die from the disease.

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"Cancer does not discriminate. It crosses all social and economic barriers," said Darlene Santana, associate executive director for the American Cancer Society. "Like any cancer diagnosis that can be prevented, it's sad that we will have that many cases."

Although the majority of skin cancers are successfully treated, the mortality rate is shocking because many of the deaths could have been avoided by early detection and treatment.

"We always stress the importance of early detection because the earlier a problem is found, the more treatable the problem will be," said Uyen Phan, director of communications for the Cancer Association of Greater New Orleans. "It's disheartening when people die of something that could

have been treatable if caught earlier."

Routinely performing a self-examination is one way to possibly detect the disease in its infancy. This can be performed by using mirrors. To inspect hard to see areas, the association suggests that you enlist the help of a friend. When conducting the examination, each mole should be plotted on a chart. The examiner should pay particular attention to any unusual colors, such as multiple shades of dark brown, black, red, white or blue surrounding the edge of the mole. Other danger signs are changes in size and shape. Sudden or continuous enlargement and elevation of a previously flat area combined with itching, pain and tenderness should also raise red flags.

"We know our bodies better than anyone else, so if something were to appear today that wasn't there yesterday, we would be the first ones to know," Santana said.

Oozing, bleeding, redness and swelling are changes in the skin's surface or consistency. These are potential danger signs of which everyone should be aware.

The shoulders and backs are where abnormal moles are most commonly discovered.

However, the scalp, breast and buttocks should not be overlooked. While performing the examination, if any abnormalities are detected, contact your health care practitioner promptly, Santana said. Otherwise, the findings should be shown to the doctor during your annual checkup.

There are at least eight known contributing factors to skin cancer: sunshine, geography, skin tone, heredity, work areas, race, age and the ozone layer. Sunshine emits ultraviolet rays. The rays alter the genetic material in skin cells. As a result, they are considered the primary cause of skin cancer. Because UV rays are a form of radiation, repeated exposure can increase the chances of contracting the deadly disease.

"The effect of ultraviolet radiation from the sun builds up over years of exposure. So, although a nice glowing tan may make you look good now, it will increase your risk of getting skin cancer in the future," said Phan.

Applying sunscreen at least 30 minutes before going into the sun, wearing protective clothing, and protecting your eyes and lips are a few helpful tips consumers are advised to follow. Not going outside during peak periods of the day and not underestimating the dangers of UV rays on cloudy days are also suggested. People taking Retin-A and certain antihistamines should avoid exposure to the sun.

Of the various methods to possibly prevent skin cancer, Phan stressed avoiding tanning salons. She said many people don't realize that tanning beds can increase the risk of getting skin cancer because people don't experience the same type of burn that they get from being in the sun. However, the UV rays emitted from fluorescent tubes can cause the same effects as UV rays released from the sun.

"There really is no such thing as a safe tan," said Phan.

For information regarding skin cancer prevention or treatment, contact the CAGNO at (800) 624-2039 or the ACS at (800) ACS-2345.

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