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Idaho has among the highest rates of deadly skin cancer in the United States

BY COLLEEN LAMAY - clamay@idahostatesman.com

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Because her fair skin burns easily, Patti Guicheteau has used sunscreen religiously on her face for more than two decades and gets regular skin checks.

Despite the 54-year-old's diligent use of sunscreen, she has had at least five precancerous lesions removed, mainly from her face.

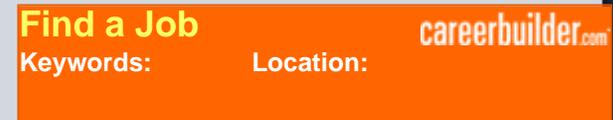
The damage likely was done years ago. "I had a lot of sun exposure when I was young," Guicheteau said.

Rates of melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, have steadily risen in Idaho since the mid-1970s.

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Katherine Jones / Idaho Statesman
Five years ago, Patti Guicheteau was diagnosed



New melanoma diagnoses increased at a rate of about 3.6 percent each year since 1975.

Idaho's annual rate of new melanoma diagnoses was seventh highest in the United States from 2001 to 2005. In 2005, the most recent year for which comparative data is available, Idaho's rate was the nation's sixth highest at 26.3 cases for every 100,000 people.

It has remained in the top five since, according to state officials. About 40 people each year in Idaho die of melanoma.

WHY ARE OUR RATES SO HIGH?

Nobody knows for sure, but here are some theories from Dr. James Stewart, a Treasure Valley dermatologist, and Patti Moran, comprehensive cancer control program manager for the state of Idaho:

Ⓜ Doctors are more scarce in rural Idaho than in the Treasure Valley and other urban hubs. People in rural areas see doctors less.

Ⓜ Idaho's mild climate means we spend lots of time outdoors. Some evidence indicates that the intermittent exposure to damaging rays to weekend mountain bikers or kayakers may be more damaging than ongoing exposure like what ranchers or farmers get.

Ⓜ Idaho has a higher proportion of Caucasians, who burn more easily and are more likely to have a family history of melanoma.

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

If cancer isn't enough to convince you to protect yourself, think about your aging face. The skin on your face would look as smooth as the skin on your posterior if your face had the same amount of shade you give your rear end.

with pre-cancerous growths when she had a screening with dermatologist James Stewart. Since then, she's kept alert for new growths and recently visited Dr. Stewart to a couple spots on her face, and one on her hand, removed with liquid nitrogen. "For the last 30 years, I've worn sunscreen every day," she says. "This is damage from when I was young and didn't wear sunscreen."



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PROTECT YOURSELF

Suggestions from Treasure Valley dermatologist Dr. James Stewart and Patti Moran, comprehensive cancer control program manager for Idaho.

Ⓜ When it comes to sunscreen, make comfort a top priority. If you buy a brand that feels good on your skin, you're more likely to use it. Reapply sunscreen every two hours, even if the product says it's waterproof or sweat proof. Some of the products Dr. Stewart uses are Oil of Olay Complete SPF 30 Defense Daily UV Moisturizer - Sensitive Skin, which is available off the shelf, and Vanicream spf 35, which you can buy on the Internet. Stewart sells it in his office as a courtesy for \$12 a tube, he said.

Ⓜ Create your own shade. Wear a broad-brimmed hat that shades your neck and ears, take an umbrella to the beach, wear long-sleeved pants and shirts.

Ⓜ Urge public officials to create more shade

A tan is not protection against the sun's rays or a sign of good health. It is the visible damage you have done to your skin.

EARLY PREVENTION

The sun damage Guicheteau suffered likely happened when she was a child in Wyoming, she said. Hers was a generation raised in the sun.

But with her annual skin checks and her sunscreen use, Guicheteau is doing exactly what dermatologists and public health authorities wish all of us did.

She said she always has encouraged her kids, now ages 23, 21 and 17, to prevent sun damage, and they are more careful than she was at the same age about using sunscreen.

Just a few blistering sunburns in childhood increases the risk of skin cancer later in life.

"They don't sunbathe," she said. "If they go out in the sun, they wear sunscreen. I don't think they've ever had a sunburn." Other measures haven't caught on as much.

Colleen LaMay: 377-6448

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structures at places such as public swimming pools.

® Stay vigilant on cloudy days. You still can get burned.

® Ask your doctor whether you should see a dermatologist to have regular skin checks

® Skip the tanning booth.

® If you are a golfer, wear two gloves.

® Avoid extended time outside from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the rays are most damaging.

® Wear sunglasses that protect your eyes against eye diseases and cataracts caused by the sun.

® Wear lip balm with an SPF rating. Otherwise, your lips can burn.

® Don't put sunscreen on babies younger than 6 months old. Shade them instead.

® See a doctor if you have a mole that doesn't look right. A doctor should check any mole bigger than a pencil eraser. Call the Idaho CareLine at 211 to get more information about early detection and other issues.

KINDS OF SKIN CANCER

Basal cell carcinoma

It is the most common form of non-melanoma cancer in the United States. According to the American Cancer Society, 75 percent of all skin cancers are basal cell carcinomas. It starts in the top layer of the skin and grows slowly.

Squamous cell carcinoma

It is the second-most common form of non-melanoma skin cancer. It rarely causes problems when caught and treated early.

Untreated, it can spread to other parts of your body, causing serious complications.

Melanoma

It is serious and difficult to treat in its later stages, it is responsible for 75 percent of all skin cancer deaths.

Sources: Medline Plus, Mayo Clinic.org, McClatchy New Services.

THE LOWDOWN ON MELANOMA IN IDAHO

- **Sunburn.** A 2004 survey found that 48.5% of white adults in Idaho had at least one sunburn in the past year. Sunburns are a significant risk factor for development of skin cancer.
- **Melanoma** is responsible for 75 percent of all skin cancer deaths.
- **Caseload.** An estimated 360 state residents were diagnosed with melanoma in 2008.
- Among whites—who are at the highest risk for melanoma—Idaho had the 11th highest melanoma incidence rate in the U.S. from 2001 to 2005.
- **New diagnoses.** New diagnoses of melanoma increased at a rate of about 3.6% per year in Idaho from 1975 to 2006.
- **For men.** The rate of increase was higher for males (4.2% per year) than for females (2.8% per year).
- **Deaths.** Idaho had the highest melanoma death rate nationally from 2001-2005—26% higher than the U.S. average.
- About 40 people in the state die of melanoma every year.

THE SKINNY ON SUNSCREEN

Sunscreens labeled with SPFs as high as 100 are now available. Higher numbers do mean more protection, but many people mistakenly think that the SPF scale is linear - for example, that a sunscreen with an SPF 45 rating would give 3 times as much protection as one with an SPF of 15.

This is not true. SPF 15 sunscreens filter out about 93 percent of UVB rays, while SPF 30 sunscreens filter out about 97 percent, SPF 50 sunscreens about 98 percent, and SPF 100 about 99 percent.

The higher you go, the smaller the difference becomes. No sunscreen provides complete protection. Regardless of the SPF, sunscreen should be reapplied about every two hours.

Source: American Cancer Society

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