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THE NORTH COUNTRY HEALTH EFFECT

A health & safety guide brought to you by the Clinton County Health Department.



Skin cancer & sun safety

It takes just 15 minutes for the sun's rays to damage your skin. Over time, this can lead to skin cancer. Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the US, but most cases are preventable. The typical weather in the North Country makes it easy to think skin cancer is not an issue. However, Clinton County rates of melanoma are higher than state and national rates, and our residents also experience sunburn(s) at higher rates.

Skin cancer

Exposure to UV radiation during childhood and adolescence has been linked to increased rates of skin cancer, including melanoma.

Anyone can get skin cancer, but some of us are at greater risk, including people with:

- a lighter natural skin color
- skin that burns, freckles, or reddens easily
- blue or green eyes
- blonde or red hair
- certain types and a large number of moles
- a personal or family history of skin cancer
- older age

There are two main types of skin cancer:

nonmelanoma (including squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma) and **melanoma**.

Nonmelanoma skin cancer is more common and most basal and squamous cell cancers can be cured. Melanoma is more likely to spread and can be harder to cure.

A change in your skin is the most common sign of skin cancer. That could be a new growth, a sore that doesn't heal, or a change in an existing mole. **Not all skin cancers look the same.** You should talk to your health care provider if you notice changes like these in your skin.

Prevent the burn

Being exposed to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a risk factor for skin cancer. UV radiation can come from the sun's rays or tanning beds/sun lamps. Reduce your risk of exposure with these prevention measures.

Sunscreen:

People of all skin types should apply sunscreen with an SPF 15 or greater that protects against both types of sun radiation (look for "UVA and UVB protection" or "broad spectrum" on the label).

Apply sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before going outside and reapply every two hours or after swimming, sweating or toweling off.

Check the date. Sunscreen becomes less effective over time, increasing your chances of a burn. For sunscreen that does not have an expiration date, a guideline is to throw it away after three years. Leaving your sunscreen in hot temperatures, like cars, can also reduce its effectiveness more quickly.

Other preventive behaviors:

Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from UV rays which can cause cataracts later in life. Look for glasses that state "100% UV ray protection" on the label.

Wear hats, long sleeve shirts, and other cover-ups for additional protection from the sun.

Avoid outdoor activities (or stay in the shade) when the sun's rays are the strongest—usually late morning through mid-afternoon.

Skin cancer screenings

Much like screening for other cancers, skin cancer screening looks for cancer BEFORE a person has any symptoms. When cancers are found at an early stage they are usually easier to treat.

A visual self-exam is a basic screening tool. This involves checking yourself for new growths, sores that don't heal, or changes in existing moles. You know your body best; if you notice a change it is important to share that with your provider.

An exam by a health care provider is another screening tool. This may be something your provider includes in their routine annual exam or something they recommend you see a specialist for. In these exams, the provider will check your skin for moles, birthmarks, or other pigmented areas that look abnormal in shape, size, or texture. These are more important for people who have already had or are at a greater risk for developing skin cancer (see page 2).

If your provider finds something abnormal, a biopsy is usually done and sent for testing.



Indoor tanning

NYS Public Health Law prohibits persons under 18 years of age from using UV radiation devices. Age restriction laws like this one have been linked to a significant decrease in indoor tanning among female high school students.

Since the law was put in place in 2018, Clinton County tanning facilities have decreased from 17 to 7 in 2024.



Sunscreen dispensers

Whether its an impromptu visit to a playground, a beach trip longer than expected or you simply forgot to apply sunscreen, CCHD has you covered. Dispensers offering free sunscreen have been added across the county in a an attempt to help your family sun safe and reduce rates of skin cancers in our community.

CCHD and our partners have installed more than 20 sunscreen dispensers at beaches, parks and trails throughout Clinton County.

For more health & safety tips, visit
www.clintonhealth.org/nchealtheffect
or scan the QR code.



Information in this guide was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, **www.cdc.gov**); the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH, **www.health.ny.gov**); and the National Cancer Institute (**www.cancer.gov**).