

facts about: *Skin Cancer*

## CALIFORNIA

**Skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in the United States.**<sup>1-4</sup> This fact sheet presents statistics about skin cancer for California and the United States as a whole.

### increasing risk: *Skin Cancer in California*

- **Sunburns.** A 2004 survey found that 34.8% of white adults in California had at least one sunburn in the past year.<sup>5</sup> Sunburns are a significant risk factor for the development of skin cancer.<sup>6-8</sup>
- **New Cases of Melanoma.** Melanoma—responsible for 75% of all skin cancer deaths—is the 5<sup>th</sup> most common cancer among Caucasians in California. The rate of new diagnoses of melanoma in California has increased over the past decade, especially among Hispanics and Caucasians.<sup>9</sup>
  - An estimated 9,080 state residents were diagnosed with melanoma in 2009.<sup>2</sup>
  - San Luis Obispo County has the highest rate of new melanoma diagnoses in the state, 106% above the national average.<sup>10,11</sup>
- **Deaths from Melanoma.** About 2 Californians die of melanoma each day, for a total of more than 800 deaths from melanoma every year.<sup>12</sup>
  - Tuolumne County has the highest melanoma death rate in the state, 96% higher than the national average.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1-42</sup> All references can be found on the SunWise Web site at: [www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html)

### survivor story: *Nate Schwegman*



In 2008, I noticed an irritating mole on my back. Even though it was painful I waited until it was pretty bad before finally having it checked. You wouldn't believe how shocked I was to learn that, at 23 years old, I had Stage III melanoma.

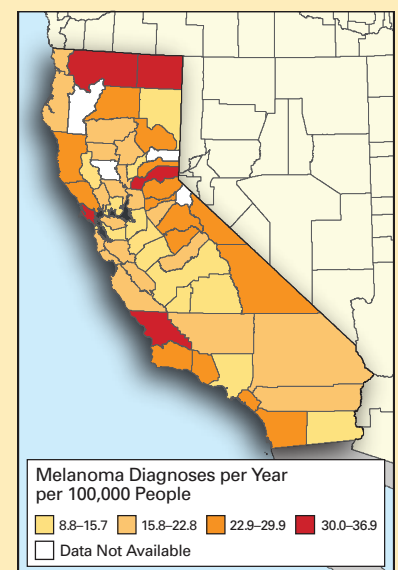
A month later I had surgery to remove the melanoma and check if the cancer had metastasized. Since the cancer had spread to my lymph nodes, I underwent two months of interferon therapy. Though the treatment was very hard on my body—and expensive—the tests now show that the cancer is gone!

Before my diagnosis I spent a lot of time in the sun and sometimes went to tanning salons. Now, I always protect myself. When I'm outside I use a lot of sunscreen and reapply it often. And never again will I lie in a tanning bed.

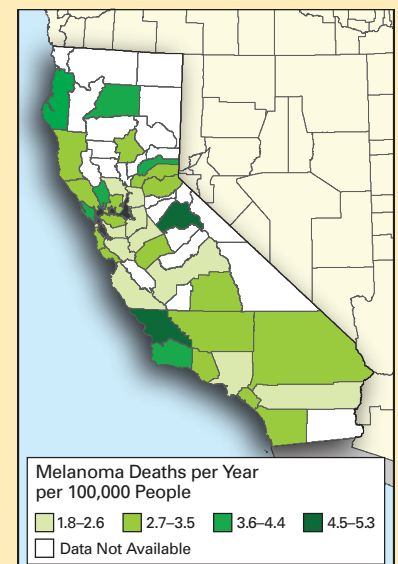
Remember to always keep your skin safe: stay away from tanning beds and be sure to protect yourself from the sun!

*Nate Schwegman, a resident of Irvine, CA, was 23 years old when he was diagnosed with Stage III melanoma.*

**Annual Rate of New Melanoma Diagnoses, 2002–2006<sup>10</sup>**  
All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages



**Melanoma Death Rates, 2002–2006<sup>12</sup>**  
All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages



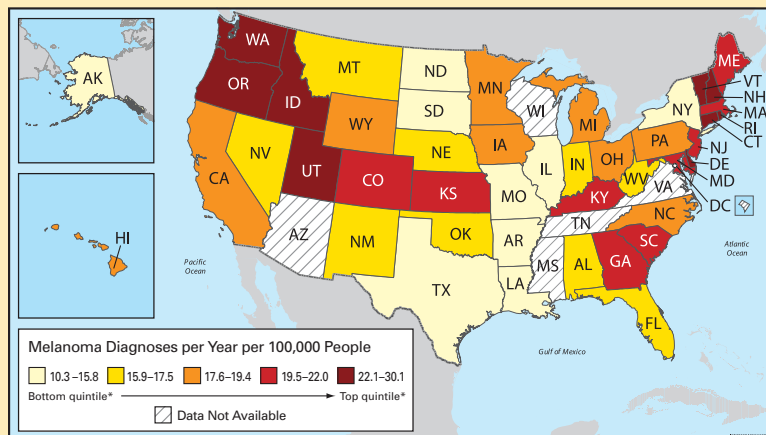
## The Cost of Skin Cancer

*In the U.S., medical costs to treat skin cancer are estimated at almost \$2 billion annually.<sup>13-14</sup>*

### statistics: *Cause for Concern*

- **In 2009, more than 1 million people were diagnosed with skin cancer, making it the most common of all cancers.<sup>1-4</sup> More people were diagnosed with skin cancer in 2009 than with breast, prostate, lung, and colon cancer combined.<sup>2</sup> About 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime.<sup>15</sup>**
- **One American dies of melanoma almost every hour.<sup>2</sup>**
- **Melanoma is the second most common form of cancer for adolescents and young adults (15-29 years old).<sup>16</sup>**
- **For people born in 2006, 1 in 53 will be diagnosed with melanoma<sup>17</sup>—nearly 30 times the rate for people born in 1930.<sup>18</sup>**

**National Annual Rate of New Melanoma Diagnoses, 2002–2006<sup>19</sup>**  
All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages, Age-adjusted Rates



\* Please note that delays in reporting melanoma cases to cancer registries are more common since they are usually diagnosed and treated in non-hospital settings such as physician offices. States are grouped into quintiles based on rates of melanoma diagnoses. A quintile is a statistical “block” representing 20% of a total. Because data are available for only 45 states, each quintile includes nine states. For example, the nine states with the highest melanoma rates—22.1 to 30.1 diagnoses per 100,000 residents every year—are in the top quintile.

### what works: *An Ounce of Prevention*

- **Unprotected exposure to ultraviolet light—a known human carcinogen—is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer.<sup>6,13,20-24</sup> Taking simple steps as early in life as possible can reduce one’s risk.<sup>2-4,25,26</sup>**
- **Early detection of melanoma can save one’s life.<sup>27-33</sup> Skin examinations may be the best way to detect skin cancer early.<sup>2,34-38</sup>**
- **The CDC found evidence that education and policy approaches in primary schools (for children) and in recreational or tourism settings (for adults) can improve sun safety behaviors.<sup>39-40</sup>**
- **Student self-reported data<sup>41</sup>—collected as part of the U.S. EPA’s SunWise Program—showed that teachers using the SunWise Tool Kit for 1-2 hours yearly can spur increases in students’ sun safety knowledge and attitudes and small to modest improvements in short-term sun safety behaviors.<sup>42</sup>**
  - Using the data mentioned above, published modeling results show SunWise teaching between 1999 and 2015 could prevent more than 50 premature deaths and 11,000 future cases of skin cancer, saving the country more than \$30 million in medical costs and productivity losses.<sup>42</sup>

### skin cancer prevention: *Action Steps*

- **Do Not Burn.** Overexposure to the sun is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancer.
- **Avoid Sun Tanning and Tanning Beds.** UV light from tanning beds and the sun causes skin cancer and wrinkling.
- **Use Sunscreen.** Generously apply a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Reapply at least every two hours, and after swimming or sweating.
- **Cover Up.** Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses with 99-100% UVA/UVB protection, when possible.
- **Seek Shade.** Seek shade when the sun’s UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- **Watch for the UV Index.** Pay attention to the UV Index when planning outdoor activities to prevent overexposure to the sun.

<sup>1-42</sup> All references can be found on the SunWise Web site at: [www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/statefacts.html)