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## **UNLV SCHOOL OF NURSING OFFERS PREVENTATIVE TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE IN THE SUN THIS SUMMER**

LAS VEGAS – March 24, 2008 – Skin cancer is on the rise throughout the nation, affecting people of every age and ethnic group. With more than 300 sunny days on average in Southern Nevada each year, area residents are at increased risk of developing malignant melanoma, a cancer of the body's pigment-producing cells.

“Everyone in the community should be aware of the harmful effects of sun exposure,” says UNLV Nursing instructor Susan VanBeuge, who educates healthcare professionals nationwide on screening for skin cancers. “Those who spend a lot of time in the sun should be particularly aware, but it’s important to note that normal daily activities such as driving and yard work can result in accumulated exposure and be just as harmful in the long term.”

With summer just around the corner, VanBeuge offers the following preventative tips to reduce the negative effects of everyday sun exposure:

### **Know the Risk Factors**

Melanoma is most common in Caucasians over the age of 65. While Black and Hispanic Americans have a lower incidence rate, the mortality rate is much higher as diagnosis is often delayed due to darker skin tones. Family history also strongly correlates with the risk for developing melanoma of the skin. Research shows that those with a family history of melanoma are up to 10 times more likely to develop the disease in their lifetime. Additional risk factors include excessive sun exposure, severe sunburns during childhood, fair skin and a preponderance of freckles/moles.

(more)

**Protect Yourself from the Sun**

To avoid the negative effects of Ultraviolet (UV) rays, it's recommended to avoid direct sun exposure during 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.; wear sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher; and cover sun exposed areas with clothing. UV A and B rays penetrate the skin and produce melanin, a dark, natural pigment that moves toward the outer layers of the skin and makes it appear tan. Short-wave UVB rays, more prevalent in the summer, are the most harmful to the skin and are believed to cause most skin cancers. Long-wave UVA rays penetrate deeper into the skin and are responsible for aged-looking skin.

**Know What to Look For**

Identifying changes in the skin through regular self exams is one the best ways to detect skin cancers early, when they are almost entirely treatable. The following traits are commonly used during diagnosis:

- Asymmetry- If a line is drawn through the mole/lesion, the two halves won't match
- Border- Borders of early melanoma tend to be uneven
- Color- A variety of colors on the same mole/lesion can be a sign of melanoma
- Diameter- Though size varies, melanomas are usually more than a quarter inch wide
- Elevation- Any change in size, shape, color or elevation can be a sign of melanoma

Though skin cancer is on the rise in the U.S., a recent decline in melanoma-associated mortality is thought to be the result of better screening and increased awareness. If a suspicious lesion or mole is identified, a physician should be contacted immediately.

Susan VanBeuge is a licensed family nurse practitioner and clinical instructor at the UNLV School of Nursing. She regularly presents to primary care providers on screening for breast, colon and skin cancer, and recently published "The Sun's Evil Enterprise: Malignant Melanoma," in the journal *Advance for Nurse Practitioners*. For more information on melanoma, please visit [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).

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