

Mother, May “Eye”?

by Carol Sullivan

Sorry about the pun on the old childhood game! In addition to eighteen other health issues, May is “Ultraviolet Awareness Month.” This, of course, equally applies to melanoma and skin cancer (May is also “Melanoma/Skin Cancer Detection and Prevention” month); but this article will focus on eye health, especially as related to ultraviolet exposure.

Sunglasses are an important protection for your eyes. In addition to reducing glare, they can block all UV-A and UV-B rays that strike them. You should buy sunglasses that: block 99-100% of both UV-A and UV-B rays (if they don’t have a tag that says so, they probably don’t!); reduce glare; don’t distort colors or shapes; and are comfortable enough that you will wear them regularly! A broad brimmed hat will give additional protection from rays that come from directly overhead.

Transition lenses that darken automatically on exposure to UV rays are available in all prescription glasses. They are a good way for many to protect their eyes during short exposures that may not trigger putting on sunglasses. Disadvantages include the small diameter of many styles (which give less protection) and the variation in the amount of darkening (not UV blocking), which may differ depending on the prescription.

Children need sunglasses, too. Their eyes are even more vulnerable to UV rays that are those of adults. In choosing glasses for your children, they should fit well, be impact resistant, and large enough to shade the eyes from most angles. A broad-brimmed hat is also valuable here.

Protection from UV rays is important for the skin because they are directly associated with basal cell cancers and melanomas. It is important for the eyes because they are directly associated with cataract formation and macular degeneration. Cataracts can usually be removed, but macular degeneration represents the leading cause of central blindness in persons over fifty. It is not curable.

For more information or help in sharing eye-health information in your parish, contact Carol Sullivan, the Diocese of Easton Liaison to the National Episcopal Health Ministries at 410-827-6907 or songofjoy@dmv.com.

May 2007