Detect and prevent skin cancer

While this is a great time of year to get outside, it’s important to be mindful of ultraviolet (UV) radiation risks. UV radiation exposure is linked to skin damage, including the development of skin cancer.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. The most deadly form is melanoma, killing over 9000 people annually. UV radiation can also contribute to ocular melanoma, a type of eye cancer.

Basal and squamous cell carcinomas are far less deadly but still serious. Basal cell skin cancer can result in disfigurement, and roughly two percent of squamous cell cancer patients died of the disease in 2012.

Prevention and detection: Everyone is at risk for skin cancer. Fortunately, there are a number of steps people can take to prevent skin cancer and ensure early diagnosis.

✦ Take precautions against overexposure to the sun. Use a high SPF sunscreen when going out, and reapply during the day. The sun is at its peak between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., but UV exposure can happen at any time the sun is out and even on cloudy days.

✦ Avoid tanning beds. In addition to increasing one’s risk of skin cancer, exposure to UV radiation can accelerate skin aging.

✦ Make sure that both prescription eyewear and sunglasses have a UV coating to protect the eyes. Many eyeglass manufacturers include this coating at no additional cost, but it’s important to verify that glasses or prescription lenses offer UV protection.

✦ Ask about skin cancer screenings during medical checkups. A doctor can assess your risk of developing skin cancer and may refer you to a dermatologist for specialized observation and care.

✦ Know the signs of possible skin cancer. A new spot or mark on the skin should be brought to the attention of a medical professional at once. Keep an eye on moles. If a mole starts to bleed or change shape, seek medical attention immediately.

Dear God, we thank you for the gift of nature’s renewal. Remind us through the day to watch for our own safety and that of others. Amen.

Resources: Advocatehealth.com • Centers for Disease Control: cdc.gov/cancer/skin/statistics • American Academy of Dermatology: aad.org/spot-skin-cancer • Ocular Melanoma Foundation: ocularmelanoma.org

Faith communities: Help prevent skin cancer

Spring and summer is an exciting time for many faith communities. School will soon be out, and congregations and their children’s and youth groups look forward to picnics, outdoor rummage sales, camps and field trips.

It’s also a time when community members may be exposed to unhealthy levels of UV radiation, increasing their risk of skin cancer. Here are some things that faith communities can do to raise awareness of and address these risks:

✦ Encourage outdoor event attendees to both wear sunscreen and bring a bottle with them so they can reapply it during the day. This is particularly important if the day’s activities include sports and/or swimming. Perspiration and exposure to water can wash away sunscreen.

✦ Parents should be encouraged to apply sunscreen to their children before an activity and pack sunscreen with their child’s lunch so that it can be reapplied throughout the day.

✦ Ask your parish nurse or another member of the congregation who is a healthcare professional to spearhead a skin cancer awareness program. Make congregants aware of the importance of protecting their skin against UV rays and talking to their doctor about their own risk of skin cancer.

✦ Talk to young people in the congregation about the risks of tanning and tanning beds. Influential members of your congregation’s youth group can exert positive peer pressure and encourage healthy choices and behaviors.

✦ Provide support to individuals who have been diagnosed with skin cancer or who are concerned that a spot or a changing mole may be cancerous.

✦ Don’t minimize a skin cancer diagnosis and be supportive when an individual expresses fear about the possibility of melanoma. If appropriate, offer to accompany the individual to a doctor’s appointment to have a spot or mole checked out.