

Melanoma deaths down, says cancer group

ICA survey reveals 90% think they're not at risk of contracting skin cancer

• By JUDY SIEGEL

Death rates from the most dangerous kind of skin cancer – melanoma – have declined significantly in recent years due to early detection, the Israel Cancer Association said Tuesday.

The ICA will hold its annual Skin Cancer Awareness Week starting Monday, May 23.

Some 300 health fund clinics around the country will be open for free screenings to detect early signs of the malignant tumor. A third of melanoma patients are diagnosed at a very early stage, making their chances for full recovery higher than ever. The rate of those diagnosed early had multiplied seven times in women and four times in men since the '80s, the ICA said.

Prof. Lital Keinan-Boker, deputy head of the Health

Ministry's Israel Center for Diseases Control and an adviser to the ICA, said that in 2013 (the last year for which there are records) 1,634 new melanoma patients (1,115 of them with invasive melanoma) were diagnosed. Some 519 were diagnosed at an early stage, when the chances for a cure are high.

Of those found to have invasive melanoma, 94 percent were Jews, 1% Arabs and 5% others. Israeli men are significantly more likely to get melanoma than women.

The survival rates for invasive melanoma over a period of five years is now high and rising – 88.3% in men and 92.5% in women. However, in the same year, 214 Israelis – 127 men and 87 women – died of the tumor. The average age of death is 73 in men and 74 in women.

According to an ICA representative survey by phone of 400 adults and 200 teens aged 15 to 17, about 90% thought they were not at risk of getting skin cancer. Those who thought they were in danger were previous skin cancer patients, those who had moles removed or are being supervised by dermatologists. Seventy percent of those who have had moles removed said they are more careful about sun exposure, while 20% said they had not changed their behavior as a result of it.

About eight in 10 of those surveyed knew that exposure to the sun without sunscreen, hats and light clothing can result in skin cancer.

Teenagers are more worried about burns, which involve high risk of skin cancer, while adults were more concerned about sun spots on the skin,



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wrinkles and aging and drying of the skin. Those who weren't worried about the cancer said: "It won't happen to me."

But most of those queried agreed that it is no longer true that "tanning is sexy." More than half had thought so 12 years ago. Last year, only 15%

thought tanning was sexy.

A majority of bathers in the sea and swimming pools prefer to go after 4 p.m., when the rays of the sun are weaker. Also, the use of artificial tanning beds has declined to 5% of young people – more by boys than girls.

The ICA has launched a program in which professional cosmeticians will refer customers to dermatologists if they see a problem on the skin. Two years ago, hair stylists were trained for the same purpose.

To make an appointment for a skin check-up at one's health fund, call the health fund or the ICA's Telemeida service at 1-800-599-995.

During Skin Cancer Awareness Week, Super-Pharm will donate one shekel from the sale of Life sunscreens to the association.