

'Don't expose yourself to the dark side of the sun'

Israel Cancer Association to hold Skin Cancer Awareness Week

• By JUDY SIEGEL

There is good news on skin cancer: Israel is no longer located among the top places in the table of melanoma prevalence and death rates in a comparison of 20 countries. Israeli men are in 13th place in morbidity rates and eighth place in death rates, while their female counterparts are in 20th and 10th place, respectively.

Australia and New Zealand, which suffer from holes in the protective ozone in the atmosphere, hold the (unprestigious) top places.

The Israel Cancer Association announced this on Wednesday to inform the public about events for Skin Cancer Awareness Week in May. Hundreds of health fund clinics will offer free skin checks between May 11 and 17.

Dr. Lital Keinan-Boker, deputy director of the Health Ministry's Centers for Disease Control, said that in 2012, there were 1,293 new cases of melanoma, of these 940 of them with invasive melanoma (that has spread into the body) and 353 with focused melanoma (which means more patients are being diagnosed early, thanks, said the ICA, to its informational efforts).

Melanoma rates were highest in 2012 among Jews of European and American origin, because they are generally lighter in skin – and thus less protected – than those of Oriental origin. Survival rates in men rose from 85.5 percent in 2011 to 88.3% and respectively from 89.7% to 92.6% in women. A total of 230 Israelis died of melanoma in 2012 – a stable figure since 2000. The prevalence and mortality rates of melanoma is very low among Arab Israelis – 21 cases of invasive melanoma and two cases of focused melanoma in 2012.

People with fair skin, hair and eyes and freckles; those whose skin burns easily; and those who have more than 20 "beauty spots" are at highest risk for skin cancer, accord-

ing to the ICA.

Infants up to the age of six months should be kept out of the sun entirely, and exposure in young children above that age should be minimal. People who due to their profession or hobbies are out in the sun for long periods, such as sailors and farmers, as well as divers, surfers, swimmers and those involved in other water sports, should protect themselves with light, long-sleeved clothing, wide-brimmed hats and sunscreen. When the skin is wet, the amount of dangerous UV radiation absorbed increases.

Patients who take medications that increase the skin's sensitivity to sunlight should consult their doctors, as should people taking immunosuppressive therapy and those with first-degree relatives who have had skin cancer.

The ICA's new campaign against skin cancer is called: "Don't expose yourself to the dark side of the sun."

During the week, Israelis will receive messages over their cellphones advising them not to remain exposed to the sun at the beach between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. There will be public service ads throughout the summer using French tourists – who love the sun – recommending that Israelis avoid staying in the sun. Another message will warn against going to tanning salons, calling their equipment "Cancer in a box."

In addition, the ICA will distribute user-friendly booklets on avoiding sun cancer to schools, health fund clinics and elsewhere.

The ICA is organizing a seminar open to the public on the subject of melanoma and less-dangerous basal cell carcinoma on June 30 at its headquarters in Givatayim. More information on this and other events can be obtained by calling 1-800-599-995. The Super-Pharm chain has decided to donate NIS 1 from every sales of Life sunscreen to the ICA for anti-skin cancer activities.