

CONCERTED EFFORTS TO REDUCE RISING SKIN CANCER RATES IN A SUNNY, HIGH-ALTITUDE ENVIRONMENT

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Rates of melanoma in persons aged 18-29 years decreased from 9.2 per 100,000 (n=51) to 5.0 per 100,000 (n=31) between 2004 and 2014 in the high-altitude state of Colorado in the U.S. UV radiation intensifies at high elevations and Colorado's skin cancer rates are higher than the national average. While no causal effect is being asserted for this significant decline, considerable skin cancer prevention research, outreach, and advocacy has been enacted by behavioral scientists, dermatologists and medical students, health educators, sun protection companies, and community volunteers in this state in the last 15 years. These individuals coalesce via the volunteer Skin Cancer Task Force of the non-profit Colorado Cancer Coalition and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (state government).

Research efforts have included education of pediatric patients' parents, occupational and school policy promotion, recreation and resort interventions, school curricula and multimedia programs, indoor tanning messaging studies, adolescent media literacy, mobile app development, tattoo studio education, and shade structure construction, among others.

Outreach efforts have included community health fairs, industry trade shows, worksite and school trainings, skin cancer screenings, UV-damage camera photographs, an educational website, a training webinar, school curricula, and print materials. Though unsuccessful to date, the task force has lobbied the state legislature three times in the last ten years to restrict access to indoor tanning by minors.

Advocacy efforts have included meetings with legislators, testimony at hearings, and legislator education. Colorado's meaningful reduction in melanoma incidence for this age group is encouraging in light of increases in rates of melanoma worldwide. It reinforces calls for redoubling efforts to approach prevention from multiple angles and expanding successes beyond the young adult cohort.