Teens know that sun exposure can cause skin cancer. But knowing they should protect their skin from sun damage and actually doing it are two different things. Images of bronzed models and celebrities don’t help, and neither do tanning centers that target young people. These activities will help your students understand what they can do to take care of their skin.

Related KidsHealth Links

Articles for Teens:

- **Melanoma**
  TeensHealth.org/en/teens/melanoma.html

- **Tanning**
  TeensHealth.org/en/teens/tanning.html

- **Indoor Tanning**
  TeensHealth.org/en/teens/indoor-tans.html

- **I Got Blisters From a Sunburn. What Should I Do?**
  TeensHealth.org/en/teens/sunburn.html

- **Skin, Hair, and Nails**
  TeensHealth.org/en/teens/skin-hair-nails.html

- **Tips for Taking Care of Your Skin**
  TeensHealth.org/en/teens/skin-tips.html

Discussion Questions

*Note: The following questions are written in language appropriate for sharing with your students.*

1. What are the short-term effects of sun exposure? What are the long-term effects? How do the sun’s UVA and UVB rays affect the skin? Between what times of day is the sun at its strongest?

2. What should people look for in a protective sunscreen? How should they apply it? How much does sunscreen does it take to protect the skin? How can people who like a tan get the look without the sun?

3. What are the signs and symptoms of skin cancer? How old does someone have to be to get it?
Activities for Students

Note: The following activities are written in language appropriate for sharing with your students.

Show Your True Colors

Objectives:
Students will:
- Learn about the connection between tanning and cancer
- Articulate the reasons why people should protect their skin from the sun

Materials:
- “Show Your True Colors” handout
- Computer with Internet access or the school library

Class Time:
1 ½ hours

Activity:
Did you know that skin color is controlled by many genes, which is why skin comes in such a wide range of shades? Today, we’re going to start a new campaign against tanning, called “Show Your True Colors.” Your mission is to convince other students to stick with their own fantastic skin colors and think twice about tanning.

The first phase of the campaign is information. What do you think teens should know about sun exposure, sun damage, and skin cancer? What message do you want to send about the idea that a person’s real skin color looks better than a tan? Have you heard any myths floating around that you’d like to correct? Using the TeensHealth.org articles and the “Show Your True Colors” handout, design an information pamphlet to convince teens why it’s smart to stay out of the sun and tanning salons. Be sure to include convincing facts and statistics.

Extensions:
1. Next stop on the “Show Your True Colors” campaign trail: Create a bold “Show Your True Colors” poster or infographic, using magazine clippings, images from the Internet, text, and your own artwork. Encourage teens to feel comfortable in their own skin.

2. Create a skin cancer awareness video using an interview with a dermatologist and/or a skin cancer survivor; or music, dance, or whatever else you think will get attention. Share your message via social media.
Red Carpet, Tan Skin?

Objectives:
Students will:
- Evaluate images in the media for their positive and negative impacts on the tanning culture
- Explore the real costs and value of tanning

Materials:
- Computer with Internet access and printer, or old magazines
- Pen and paper, or computer word processing program with printer

Class Time:
45 minutes

Activity:
We hear again and again that sun exposure can cause skin cancer. But if you flip through a magazine or watch an entertainment news show, you may see some celebrities strolling down the red carpet or singing onstage with glowingly bronze skin. Yet, other celebrities seem to be protecting or even embracing their pale skin. What’s going on here? Clearly, we’re getting mixed messages: Tanning is bad for us, but it looks good? It looks bad, but a bunch of people do it anyway?

You be the judge. From magazines or the Internet, choose four images of famous people who have tanned at different levels. Write a one-page essay about the images, including what messages you think celebrities are sending about tanning. Be sure to include your images with your paper.

Extension:
1. Do celebrities have a responsibility to the public? Write a letter expressing your opinion to the celebrity of your choice, whether it’s a sun worshipper or a champion of the fair-skinned look.

Reproducible Materials
- Handout: Show Your True Colors
  KidsHealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/conditions/skin_cancer_handout1.pdf
- Quiz: Skin Cancer
  KidsHealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/conditions/skin_cancer_quiz.pdf
- Answer Key: Skin Cancer
  KidsHealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/conditions/skin_cancer_quiz_answers.pdf

KidsHealth.org is devoted to providing the latest children’s health information. The site, which is widely recommended by educators, libraries, and school associations, has received the “Teachers’ Choice Award for the Family” and the prestigious Pirelli Award for “Best Educational Media for Students.” KidsHealth comes from the nonprofit Nemours Foundation. Check out www.KidsHealth.org to see the latest additions!
Show Your True Colors
Instructions: Cut out your pamphlet and fold it in the middle. Using all 4 pages, write about sun exposure, sun damage, and skin cancer.
Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question.

1. Whenever you’re outside, experts recommend that you wear sunscreen with an SPF of at least:
   a. 15
   b. 30
   c. 45
   d. 60

2. If you go swimming or plan to stay outside, even waterproof sunscreen must be reapplied every:
   a. hour
   b. 1½ to 2 hours
   c. 2 to 3 hours
   d. 3 to 4 hours

3. Choose a sunscreen with a package that says:
   a. SPF 30 or higher
   b. “blocks UVA and UVB rays” or “broad spectrum protection”
   c. “hypoallergenic” and “noncomedogenic”
   d. all of the above

4. The sun’s rays are strongest between:
   a. 12 a.m. and 3 p.m.
   b. 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.
   c. 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
   d. 12 a.m. and 1 p.m.

5. True or false: People need to apply more sunscreen (with a higher SPF) when they’re around reflective surfaces like water, snow, or ice.

6. True or false: The eyes have built-in defenses that prevent them from getting any sun damage.

7. True or false: Some medications, such as prescription acne medications or birth control pills, can increase your sensitivity to the sun.

8. True or false: Tanning beds are a safe way to get some color without risking sun damage.

9. True or false: Skin cancer used to affect people in their 20s. Thanks to education and sunscreen, skin cancer mostly affects people in their 50s or older today.

10. Melanin can protect your skin only so much. If you continue to be exposed to the sun, the UV radiation can eventually damage your skin. That damage shows up as:
    a. wrinkles
    b. brown age spots or blotchiness
    c. leathery, sagging skin that looks older than it is
    d. any or all of the above
Quiz Answer Key

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