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Teen warns others to be safe in the sun

02:39 PM Mountain Standard Time on Tuesday, October 18, 2005

By Brandy Aguilar / 3TV Producer
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Like most cancers, skin cancer doesn't discriminate against anyone. Unfortunately, Valley doctors say not only are they seeing more cases, the victims are getting younger.

Like most other teens, Jacky Sims didn't think it could happen to her. But when she heard the word melanoma, her life changed forever.



Jacky Sims

"I was definitely just your typical Arizona teen," Jacky said. "I was really busy with athletics. I was always in the sun for soccer, track or whatever it was I was doing that season."

Today, the 17-year-old lives her life a little differently, especially when she goes outside. The reason? Doctors diagnosed her with melanoma more than two years ago.

"I had no family history of melanoma," Jacky said. "I didn't even know what it was and yet here I was and I was on the surgery table."

Dermatologist Dr. Paul English caught Jacky's melanoma during a routine visit.

She and her two brothers had been going to English on a regular basis to check out other moles.

"It's on the skin 99 percent of the time and we can see it," he said. "So if we can educate people on what to look for and people do regular self skin examinations, very few people should die from that condition if we're a lot more observant."

Jacky's lucky her melanoma, which was found in a mole on her chest, did not spread. But as English warns, if it's not taken care of

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early, melanoma can turn deadly.

"If you have something on your skin that you're not sure about, go get it checked," English said. "It doesn't hurt to have it looked at."

Besides taking care of her skin, Jacky, along with her mother, Terry Sims, shares her story with Valley groups through the SHADE Foundation of America.

They talk about prevention and why wearing sunscreen and protective clothing is so important when heading outdoors.

"I just recommend strongly that they consider a yearly mole check with a dermatologist, specifically, like they would with a mammogram," Sims said.

"The statistics are if you get a melanoma under the age of 18, your chances of getting a second one are 50 percent higher," Jacky said. "So I still live as though I'm really at high risk."

A second melanoma was found on Jacky's arm this past February. It, like the first one, was confined to only one area.

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