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Famous pitcher's wife crusades against skin cancer

Heather Turco

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LEE COUNTY: As we go into the holiday weekend, when thousands in Southwest Florida will enjoy the sun and surf, keep that bottle of sunscreen close. Melanoma is one of the most common cancers in people under 30.

Studies show one in every five children will grow up to develop skin cancer.

The glow of sun-kissed skin may be the look of the tropics but tanned skin is damaged skin and too much sun can cause skin cancer.

Many people would agree that sunshine and baseball go hand in hand.

Curt Schilling is the pitcher for the Boston Red Sox. While he enjoys his day in the sun, his wife, Shonda, sits in the shade and offers some advice about sunbathing.

"One in five children will grow up to have skin cancer over something we can prevent. If we start changing attitudes and the behaviors we have toward the sun," said Schilling.

Five years ago, Shonda Schilling was diagnosed with skin cancer.

"No one wants to be 33-years-old and think they are going to leave the earth, leave their children over something on their body," said Schilling.

Seventeen-year-old Eric Hogrefe has also battled skin cancer recently. But after four surgeries, including a scalp expander and other reconstruction, he is completely cancer free.

Hogrefe explained that he was diagnosed when he was 14-years-old.

"My mom cuts my hair. She's over-protective, saw something had changed and got it checked out. It was melanoma. Then over the summer, I had a lymph node test positive for melanoma," said Hogrefe.

Dr. Aurora Badia of the Florida Skin Center said that she has been seeing more and more cases of pediatric melanoma. She explained some kids are diagnosed when they are as young as three-years-old.

"Now that the protection is available, it's important we use it. One or two blistering sunburns can predispose you to other types of cancer and melanoma," said Badia.

Schilling has created the Sun Foundation of America to educate people and help them live in the sun safely and get screened for skin cancer.

"I get people all the time - people will say, I have this spot - just go, go. Why would you let it sit on your head worrying about it? Just go," Schilling said.

The good news is that skin cancer can be cured if detected early. But it can prevented altogether if you are sun-smart and follow some of these simple rules.

- Always wear a wide brimmed hat.
Wear protective clothing such as long sleeved shirts and pants.
Reduce exposure to the sun during peak hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Reapply sun block every 90 minutes. Use at least a SPF of 15.

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