

September 18, 2024

The Honorable Vivek Hallegere Murthy, MD
United States Surgeon General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

RE: Renewing the Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Skin Cancer

Dear Dr. Murthy:

On behalf of the undersigned medical associations and our skin cancer prevention partners, we are writing to call to renew the Call to Action to Prevent Skin Cancer¹ to reduce the chances of developing this largely preventable disease. Skin cancer is an urgent and pressing public health issue affecting millions of Americans.

Amid rising skin cancer rates, in July 2014, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Boris Lushniak released a critical call to action for all Americans to combat skin cancer. The call to action declared skin cancer a public health crisis in the face of staggering statistics showing that nearly 5 million people were treated for skin cancer in the U.S. each year at an estimated cost of 8.1 billion dollars. In response, to combat one of the largest contributors to skin cancer rates at the time, key legislators and public health officials worked to educate the public on indoor tanning's threats and implement policy measures that protected minors.² The efforts successfully helped to reduce skin cancer rates associated with the practice of indoor tanning.³

Even with the progress that was made under the earlier call to action, now a decade later, skin cancer remains the most common cancer in the U.S. with almost 5.5 million cases diagnosed in Americans each year – more than breast, colon, lung and prostate cancers combined.⁴ Skin cancer affects people of all ages, including children. Children spend a large amount of time outside, with research showing more than 40 percent of an individual's lifetime UV exposure occurring during the first 20 years of life, and multiple sunburn events during childhood double a person's risk of developing skin cancer later in life.^{5,6} Due to this exponential exposure to the sun's UV rays, melanoma accounts for four percent of all pediatric cancers in children between 15 and 19 and is the most common cancer in people between 24 and 29 years old.⁷ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has acted in response to the need to reduce skin cancer rates and has called for increased opportunities for sun protection, including sunscreen use.⁸

Survey results highlight the extent to which misinformation about sun exposure and skin cancer has taken root within the population: more than a third of adults aged 18-35 weren't sure if a base tan prevented skin cancer,

¹ "The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Skin Cancer." U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, July 2014, www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/call-to-action-prevent-skin-cancer.pdf.

² ASDSA *Position Statement on Indoor Tanning*. <https://www.asds.net/Portals/0/PDF/asdsa/asdsa-position-statement-indoor-tanning.pdf>

³ "Indoor and Outdoor Tanning," National Cancer Institute, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://progressreport.cancer.gov/prevention/tanning>.

⁴ "Skin Cancer." American Academy of Dermatology, 22 Apr. 2022, www.aad.org/media/stats-skin-cancer.

⁵ The Skin Cancer Foundation. Facts About Sunburn and Skin Cancer. <http://www.skincancer.org/prevention/sunburn/facts-about-sunburn-and-skin-cancer>

⁶ ASDSA *Position Statement on Sun-safe Behavior in School-aged Children*. <https://www.asds.net/Portals/0/PDF/asdsa/asdsa-position-statement-sun-safe-behavior-in-school-aged-children.pdf>

⁷ Cancer Facts and Figures 2024. American Cancer Society. <https://www.cancer.org/research/cancer-factsstatistics/all-cancer-facts-figures/cancer-facts-figures-2019.html>. Accessed July 2, 2024.

⁸ ASDSA *White Paper on Sunscreen Use in Schools*. <https://www.asds.net/Portals/0/PDF/asdsa/white-paper-sunscreen-use-in-schools.pdf>

roughly a quarter thought staying hydrated prevents sunburn and 14 percent of adults aged 18-35 believe sunscreen actually poses more harm to the skin than sun exposure.⁹

Sunscreen is one of the proven prevention strategies in limiting overexposure to ultraviolet radiation that is the cause of most skin cancers. Additionally, seeking shade and wearing protective clothing are key steps in preventing skin cancer. With one in five Americans expected to develop skin cancer in their lifetime, the need for skin cancer prevention efforts is increasingly prevalent and your leadership is critical to helping stem the staggering rates of this disease.¹⁰

We urge you to renew this call to action and request a meeting to discuss how our undersigned organizations can help the Surgeon General's office develop a plan that will spur meaningful progress in addressing skin cancer. Should you have any questions regarding this critical public health issue, please do not hesitate to contact Kristin Hellquist, Chief Advocacy Officer at the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association, at khellquist@asds.net.

Sincerely,

AIM at Melanoma
American Academy of Dermatology Association
American College of Mohs Surgery
American Melanoma Foundation
American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association
American Society for Mohs Surgery
Connect Melanoma
Dermatology Nurses' Association
IMPACT Melanoma
Jack H. Marston II Melanoma Fund
Jason Farley All In For A Cure Foundation
Kelly's Dream
Melanoma Action Coalition
Melanoma Research Alliance
Melanoma Research Foundation
National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention
Outrun the Sun, Inc.
Skin of Color Society
Society for Pediatric Dermatology
Society of Dermatology Physician Associates
Sun Safety for Kids
The Skin Cancer Foundation
The Society of Behavioral Medicine
Women's Dermatologic Society

⁹ "Young Adults Are Falling for Skin Cancer Myths, Survey Finds." Health, 17 May 2024, <https://www.health.com/young-adults-skin-cancer-myths-survey-8641934>

¹⁰ The Skin Cancer Foundation. Facts About Sunburn and Skin Cancer. <http://www.skincancer.org/prevention/sunburn/facts-about-sunburn-and-skin-cancer>