

Insurance 101: Sunscreen - The Missing Piece of Protective Equipment

Even though the first buds of spring are barely peeking out of the ground and the heat of summer seems far off in the future, it is not too early to think about protecting yourself and your players from the harmful rays of the sun. Sunscreen is often overlooked as a vital piece of safety equipment for soccer players. Yet skin cancer is the most common form of cancer, with more than one million cases reported in the US each year – and that number is rising steadily. Ninety percent of all skin cancer, whether non-melanoma or melanoma, is caused by exposure to the sun.

Who is at risk for Skin Cancer?

Those with fair skin that burns or freckles easily, who have light color eyes and red or blond hair are most at risk. However, anyone is at risk to get skin cancer, regardless of complexion color or ethnicity. Anyone with a family history of melanoma should also be especially safety conscious in the sun. And, those who have suffered a sunburn at an early age have an increased risk for skin cancer later in life.

The danger of UV rays

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun is the greatest when the sun is highest in the sky and decreases as the sun approaches the horizon. Other factors contributing to higher levels of UV radiation are elevation and cloud cover. For every 1,000 feet of elevation, UV exposure increases by 8-10%. The Skin Cancer Foundation provides this interesting fact: an athlete with average complexion playing at noon at 11,000 feet above sea level in Colorado, will burn after 6 minutes of unprotected sun exposure, compared to 14 minutes at sea level in Florida.

Protect your players from the sun

The good news is that there are many ways to protect yourself and your players while out on the field.

- Use broad-spectrum sunscreen. A bottle of sunscreen should become an automatic part of your players' safety equipment. The American Cancer Society recommends at least a palmful of SPF 15 or higher, applied liberally every 2 hours (or more often if sweating a great deal). Sunscreen should also be worn on hazy or overcast days.
- Set limits for time in the sun. Minimize your time in the sun from 10:00am to 3:00pm, when UV rays are most harmful.
- Cover up as much as possible – Coaches, officials and female players should wear hats (male players wear helmets). Wear lightweight protective clothing, especially articles that have been tested and certified as UV-protective, to block harmful rays throughout the day.
- Shade: Find shady places to play, exercise or cool down.

- Coaches and officials should wear wraparound sunglasses to protect the eyes and delicate skin around the eyes. Players should be encouraged to wear sunglasses when not wearing helmets or protective eyewear.
- Teach good sun protection safety to youth players to help them develop safety habits for a lifetime.

For further information

To learn more about skin cancer facts, prevention and sun protection, please visit the following web sites:

American Cancer Society at www.cancer.org

American Academy of Dermatology at www.aad.org

Skin Cancer Foundation at www.skincancer.org

National Coalition for Skin Cancer Prevention in Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Youth Sports at www.sunsafety.org

National Weather Service Climate Protection Center for UV Index Chart at www.nws.noaa.gov (type in Stratosphere UV Index at main menu)

There is still fun to be had in the sun, but be smart about your exposure!