

# Here comes the sun . . . burn

Pool project aims to educate kids on skin cancer risks

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*Last Updated: July 31, 2003*

**Waukesha** - Several dozen children in bathing suits gathered quickly around Katie O'Brien Thursday and begged her to squirt healthy globs of purple "alien goop" into their outstretched hands.

With smiles and wisecracks, they smeared the brightly colored sunscreen on their pals and themselves, providing protection from dangerous and potentially cancer-causing rays of the strong summer sun.

The games and talks about being safe under the sun are finally paying off, said O'Brien, who gave the lesson at Waukesha's Buchner Park pool.

As the kids lathered on the sunscreen, O'Brien told them not to miss important spots, such as behind the ears, foreheads, noses, bellies and toes.

Similar scenes are being played out this summer at three other pools - another in Waukesha and one each in Cedarburg and Hartford - as part of a national program on sun-safety practices.

Skin cancer is the fastest-growing form of cancer in the United States, with 1 million new cases diagnosed each year, says the National Cancer Institute. And the Pool Cool program is an attempt to slow down the disease.

Although anyone can get skin cancer, the risk is greatest for people who have fair skin that freckles easily, often those with red or blond hair and blue or light-colored eyes, the institute says.

The program teaches youngsters 4 and older the dangers of overexposure to sun and the possibility that blister-raising sunburns can lead to fatal skin cancer later in life.

"You get burned now and the burn goes away and you feel fine, but the damage can surface later as cancer," said national program director Tom Elliott, of Hawaii.

The program is designed for use at municipal swimming pools and is integrated into swimming instructions as a five-minute daily lesson.

## Pool Cool Program



Photo/[William Meyer](#)

Kylie Nagel (left), 8, of Milwaukee and Lyndsey Johnson, 4, of Waukesha play the purple people game by putting purple sunscreen on each other before their swim lesson at Buchner pool in Waukesha. The Pool Cool program teaches kids about the dangers of overexposure to the sun and encourages healthy habits.



Photo/[William Meyer](#)

Kelsey Grant (center), 4, of Waukesha puts on sunscreen and learns how to stay safe under the sun at Waukesha's Pool Cool project.

Pool Cool is run by the Cancer Research Center of the University of Hawaii and the National Recreation & Park Association and funded with a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Launched this summer, the program is part of a three-year study, exploring people's attitudes toward skin cancer and sun protection. It also examines municipal policies on providing shade at pools and finding ways to convince lifeguards that a good tan is not a good practice, Elliott said.

"We're also trying to figure out how to get the program to continue in a community once we're gone," Elliott said.

Two public officials who have had painful experiences with skin cancer have become allies in the effort.

Waukesha Mayor Carol Lombardi, a fair-skinned woman of Scandinavian ancestry, has had a brush with a mild form of skin cancer, which was removed through surgery.

Lombardi said she invited the disease by spending her teenage years at Buchner Park pool, where she spent hours in the sun, slathered in baby oil and getting sunburned rather than tan.

As mayor, she has thrown her support behind the program.

And Renee Vanselow, recreation supervisor of the Greenfield Parks and Recreation Department, said she lost her former boss and mentor Don Roberts to complications from skin cancer. She runs the Cool Pool program in Waukesha, Cedarburg and Hartford.

"When I heard of this program, I had to take part because of my losing Don Roberts and an uncle to complications of skin cancer," Vanselow said.

Vanselow learned of the program at a national convention of park supervisors earlier this year. Even though Greenfield doesn't have its own municipal pool, she went through the training and supervises the lessons instructors give at the four area pools.

In Waukesha alone, about 2,000 children participated in Pool Cool this summer, said Sue Harter, recreation supervisor for the city's Department of Parks,

Recreation & Forestry. The city will participate next year but likely will extend the current swimming lesson from 30 to 35 minutes to accommodate the sun-safety instruction, she said.

From the Aug. 1, 2003 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel