

Cancer Center partners with camps to teach kids sun safety



CARMEN SMYTH / NEWS-PRESS

Kids from the United Way's Fun in the Sun program enjoy a play structure while donning hats given to them by the Cancer Center of Santa Barbara's RAYS program.

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Partnering with summer camps where children spend a majority of their time in the sun, the Cancer Center of Santa Barbara promotes sun safety as part of their annual RAYS program.

This is the ninth year that the Raising Awareness Yields Sun Safety—or RAYS—program will be offered by the Cancer Center. The program teaches sun safety education and encourages young people to adopt habits that prevent excessive sun exposure.

RAYs is brought to young adults and children through summer camp programs already provided by United Way of Santa Barbara, the YMCA and the Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation department. The summer camps cater to children and adolescents from kindergarten through eighth grade, an age group that RAYS coordinators say is the best for long-lasting education.

"It's the perfect time in their lives to learn repetitive health behaviors," explained Lisa Hashbarger, health education

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Erica Ledesma, 7, reapplies sunscreen during United Way's Fun in the Sun program offered at Franklin Elementary School.



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Alberto Lagunas, left, and Hugo Porras, both 6, have their sunscreen re-applied by Fun in the Sun program leader Landon Ranck. Continual application of sunscreen is part of the Cancer Center of Santa Barbara's RAYS program.

Programs also teach organizations

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coordinator for the Cancer Center.

Because skin cancer is the most common form in the country, the program helps to inform young adults the best means of protecting themselves from an early age. Additionally, research has found that three or more episodes of blistering sunburn before the age of 20 can increase the risk of

melanoma by two to five times.

This is why the Cancer Center's main goal at the camps is to have a zero percent burn rate. The Center ensures this through passing out hats and sunscreen as well as setting up canopies around the campgrounds so that the kids are adequately protected from the sun's radiation.

In order to make sure that all of the Cancer Center's guidelines are being followed, the Center also trains the counselors who will work in the

corresponding kids' camps. "We train the staff and send them on their merry way," said Ms. Hashbarger. The counselors are, "trained to use the curriculum and how to teach the kids sun safety."

Counselors often come from local nonprofit organizations around town. When RAYS teams up with United Way's Fun in the Sun camp, all of the counselors are part of Santa Barbara or Carpinteria-based Girls Inc and the Girl Scouts of the California Central

Coast.

The program's main goals are not just to teach the children about sun awareness, but also to teach the organizations who run the camps. "We don't want to pay for the hats and the sunscreen forever," explained Ms. Hashbarger of the Cancer Center's main goal, "We want to teach them to institutionalize some of the things."

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