

# Pool Cool: Skin Cancer Meets Its Match

by: Ashley Adorante

## SUMMARY

Kansas Pool Cool is a sun safety education program for an important audience: kids at the pool. Lifeguards, swim instructors, and other pool staff are trained to teach kids about sun safety during their swim lessons. The setting is ideal for instructors to describe the benefits of sun protection and the dangers of overexposure. The Kansas Comprehensive Cancer Prevention & Control Program and the Midwest Cancer Alliance (MCA), which are key members of the Kansas Cancer Partnership (KCP), successfully expanded the program in 2015. Kansas Pool Cool can now teach more kids than ever before how to stay safe in the sun.



## CHALLENGE

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. One in five Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime, and nearly 5 million people are treated for skin cancer every year. In some cases, skin cancer is deadly, and more than 9,000 Americans die of this disease annually. The deadliest form of skin cancer, melanoma, is usually caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light, usually from the sun. Most of these cases are preventable. Skin cancer prevention is a lifetime effort that begins with good sun safety practices in childhood. Unfortunately, the majority of Americans do not regularly use sunscreen to protect themselves from the harmful effects of the sun. The challenge is raising awareness that most cases of skin cancer can be prevented.

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Pool Cool is all about collaboration. Members of the KCP shared resources and responsibilities for this program. The MCA coordinated the program and hired student interns to run train-the-trainer sessions at local pools. The Kansas Comprehensive Cancer Prevention & Control Program provided promotional items and signs about sun safety and distributed free sunscreen by the gallon.

*"Pool Cool has been a great program for my pool. The lesson plans gave great information about how to be sun safe. It was helpful to get free sunscreen, sunglasses, and chapstick to hand out at my pool."*

*- Bridget Starbuck*

## Contact

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## SOLUTION

The key to raising awareness is finding the perfect time to send your message to a specific audience. Pool Cool is designed with this concept in mind. Eight sun safety lessons are added to existing swim lessons at community pools. With the sun in the sky overhead, swim instructors hand out sunscreen, sunglasses and UV wristbands and discuss sun safety. Lessons are about 5 minutes long and lead into regular swimming instruction. By training the pool staff to teach sun safety, the Pool Cool program reaches children through the people they already know and trust. This train-the-trainer model also helps the staff because they can recall what they learned better if they teach it to others. The Pool Cool message can resonate across generations because it reaches children and adults.

## RESULTS

Pool Cool is research-tested, meaning that evidence of its effectiveness has been documented. Studies show that participants have significantly better sun protection habits than their peers. Children who complete the program seek shade more often and use sunscreen more regularly. Parents are also more likely to practice sun safety after their kids' participation in the program. Officials in Kansas have embraced the program as a way to help the state's residents protect themselves from skin cancer. In its first year, 21 pools in the Kansas City area participated. By 2015, a total of 33 pools across the state had joined. This expansion extended the program from Kansas City to Stockton, a town 306 miles away. In 2015 alone, the MCA trained 669 pool staff to provide sun safety lessons to hundreds of kids. In recognition of its efforts, Kansas Pool Cool won the 2014 Aquatic Special Event of the Year award from the Kansas Recreation and Park Association and was nominated again in 2015.

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

With support from the KCP and aquatic centers across Kansas, Pool Cool will keep growing. The MCA will continue using interns to train staff at local pools. Although the program makes its biggest splash at outdoor pools during the summer, skin cancer is always a health risk, and KCP will continue to look for ways to make a difference in the off-season. MCA is already working in this area by holding health fairs and lunch-and-learn sessions throughout the year. The KCP's next goal is to reach more sites in western and southwestern Kansas. Ultimately, KCP would like to make sun safety cool at each and every pool in Kansas.