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Assessment of the New York State School-Based Skin Cancer Prevention Initiative

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Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer occurring in the United States. The increase in incidence over the last two decades has led to the introduction of several initiatives at the state and national level. These initiatives have been aimed at increasing awareness about the disease, its risk factors and ways to minimize an individual's risk for the disease. In New York State, the Department of Health's Cancer Services Program in collaboration with the New York State Comprehensive Cancer Control Program has implemented a school based skin cancer prevention initiative, which seeks to increase awareness of the importance of adopting sun safe practices among students attending elementary schools throughout the state.

In the third phase of this initiative, schools received the Skin Cancer Prevention Toolkit and had the opportunity to apply for ultraviolet bracelets to be used as teaching aides for their students. A survey was conducted to assess the effect this phase of the initiative had on schools implementing policy, programmatic and environmental changes in their attempt to become sun safe schools. Schools reported utilizing the bracelets and tools provided in the toolkit to conduct sun safe activities and many had plans to incorporate these activities into future curriculum. Both the skin cancer prevention toolkit and the ultraviolet bracelet were described as being effective in educating students and teachers about skin cancer, its association with unprotected exposure to the sun and the importance of adopting sun safe behaviors.