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High School and College Students Take No-Tanning Pledge To Stay out of Tanning Beds for Proms and Spring Break

February 4, 2010, Concord, MA — College freshman Jillian Saley has sworn off tanning booths. An avid tanner, Saley recently got a dose of harsh reality when she heard a melanoma survivor's harrowing story. Saley had gone to a Melanoma Foundation of New England presentation and heard Meghan Rothschild tell her story. Rothschild went through an agonizingly painful operation that resulted in eight lymph nodes being removed; her body is covered with scars and she has had more than 20 subsequent operations to remove pre-cancerous moles. Rothschild, who had been a dedicated tanner when she was younger, is one of the organizers of the Foundation's Your Skin Is In program. She was diagnosed with melanoma when she was 20.

"When I heard about Your Skin Is In, I had no intention of letting something like a No-Tanning Pledge program influence me," said Saley, a student at Western New England College in Springfield, MA "but Meghan's story literally made me sick to my stomach. I will *never* go into a tanning bed again."

Saley and thousands of other college and high school students are taking part in the Melanoma Foundation of New England's No-Tanning Pledge contest — Your Skin Is In — with the goal of increasing awareness about the dangers of tanning.

"The statistics are pretty scary," says Kelli Pedroia, Red Sox wife and the Foundation's spokesperson for Your Skin Is In. "If you use a tanning booth once a month before the age of 35, your chance of getting melanoma increases by 75%. Not only that, melanoma is the second most common cancer in teens and young adults ages 15-29. It's no coincidence that the sharp increase in melanoma in recent years is tied to tanning."

"I really had no idea how stupid I was being by going to tanning salons and lying out in the sun," said Pedroia "I was literally dancing with melanoma at my senior prom, and I get chills when I think about it. I don't want anyone to hear the diagnosis I heard when I was 18: you have a life-threatening melanoma and we will have to operate to remove it along with the lymph nodes in your thigh."

According to Dr. Michael Atkins, MD, Director of Biologic and Cutaneous oncology at Boston's Deaconess-Beth Israel Hospital, there is a lot of misinformation about tanning

and melanoma. "Let's dispel the myth that tanning is safe," says Atkins "Recently the World Health Organization classified ultra-violet radiation as a Class 1 cancer causing agent, in the same category as tobacco. Tanning beds put out 3-6 times the amount of radiation given off by the sun." Dr. Atkins sits on the Foundation's Medical Advisory Board.

The Foundation's executive director, Deb Girard says, "We have a pledge program and a contest with great prizes to help spread the word including airline tickets, cash awards, gift certificates, a pizza party for 50, tickets to Six Flags New England and more. "During the long winter months, young people are using tanning beds in record numbers. Don't be fooled, the ultra violet rays from tanning are stronger than the sun and we now have data that says they cause skin cancer and melanoma."

Over the next few months, the Foundation will be sending melanoma survivors to speak at schools throughout New England to draw attention to "Your Skin Is In." They will tell their stories, urge teens to forget about tanning, and get students to join the No Tanning Pledge program and enter the contest.

High schools from each New England state have already signed up for this year's program and pledges are coming in as the deadline for the high school program nears. "Last year we had over 5,500 high school students sign our No-Tanning Pledge and this year we hope to increase that number," says Girard. The deadline for the Your Skin Is In college program is April 15, 2010.

To register for Your Skin Is In, visit www.mfne.org.

The Melanoma Foundation of New England

The Melanoma Foundation of New England is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about the importance of early detection and prevention, helping patients and their caregivers cope with melanoma, and advocating for tanning bed restrictions. The Foundation of New England was founded in 1999 and is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

Learn more about the Foundation at: www.mfne.org.

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