

Skin Cancer

Description:

Skin cancer is predominantly caused by long-term regular exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun. UVR can lead to abnormal growth of skin cells. If these abnormal cells are not destroyed by the body's natural defence systems, skin cancers may develop. Check your own skin regularly and if you notice a change in size, shape or colour to any spots on your skin, have them checked by your doctor.

Practical Advice

There are three main types of skin cancer:

- *basal cell carcinoma (most common form of skin cancer, 75%)*
- *squamous cell carcinoma (20% of all skin cancers)*
- *melanoma (the most serious type of skin cancer, 5%).*

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) is the most common form of skin cancer, and is responsible for 75% of all skin cancers. BCCs normally appear as a lump or scaling area that is red, pale or pearly in colour. A BCC normally grows slowly, appearing on the head, neck or upper body. They may become ulcerated and can be identified as a spot that won't heal. About half of BCCs recur after five years.

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) normally appears as a thickened red, scaly spot that may bleed easily or ulcerate. SCCs usually grow slowly over months and can spread to other parts of the body if left untreated. They appear on sites most often exposed to the sun. SCCs make up about 20% of all skin cancers. About half of SCCs recur after five years.

Melanoma is the most dangerous skin cancer. If left untreated, it can spread to other parts of the body. Melanomas can be either flat or nodular. Flat melanoma may develop nodular areas as they develop. Melanomas appear as a new spot or an existing spot, freckle or mole that changes colour, size or shape. A melanoma is generally more than one colour and has an irregular outline. They grow over weeks to months and can appear anywhere on the body. Melanomas make up about 5% of all skin cancers.

There are also other spots that are not skin cancer, but may act as warning signs.

- *Dysplastic Naevi appear as flat, fairly large moles, anywhere on the body. They are characterised by irregular borders and uneven colour with multiple shades of brown to pink. Dysplastic Naevi are an indication that a person is more prone to melanoma.*
- *Solar Keratoses appear as red, flattish, scaly areas that may sting if scratched. They are a warning sign that a person is more prone to developing skin cancer.*
- *Seborrhoeic Keratosis have a very distinct edge and frequently sit on top of the skin. The colour varies from pale skin through to orange and black. Their size can be from a few millimetres up to two centimetres.*
- *Moles are evenly coloured, may be raised and have clear edges. They are usually circular or oval in shape.*
- *Freckles are harmless coloured spots that range in size from one to ten millimetres. They indicate that the sun has damaged the skin.*

Check your own skin regularly and if you notice a change in size, shape or colour to any spots on your skin, have them checked by your doctor.

Other Resources

Skin Cancer

To discuss concerns about a change in size, shape or colour to any spots on your skin, see your doctor. For more information about skin cancer:

- visit [Queensland Health's Sun safety website](#)
- visit [The Cancer Council Queensland website](#)
- visit the [Australasian College of Dermatology website](#) to see what different types of skin cancer look like.

Related Content

Other fact sheets

Footnotes

Queensland Cancer Registry (2004) *Cancer in Queensland, Incidence and Mortality, 1982-2002* Cancer Council Queensland.

HealthInsite Information:

[Skin Cancer](#)