

Melanoma

What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer is an uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the skin. Melanoma accounts for approximately 1% of all skin cancers but unfortunately accounts for the majority of skin cancer related deaths. In 2019, melanoma is expected to take the lives of 7,230 Americans. Melanoma is not just skin cancer. It can develop anywhere on the body - eyes, scalp, nails, feet, genital areas, and mouth. Melanoma does not discriminate by age, race or gender. Melanoma is the leading cause of cancer death in young women ages 25-30 and the second leading cause of cancer death in women ages 30-35. In ages 15-29, melanoma is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer.

The incidence of people under 30 developing melanoma is increasing faster than any other demographic group, soaring by 50% in women since 1980.

How is it treated?

The treatment for melanoma is removal of the growth using surgery to obtain clear margins and remove adjacent skin as a safety margin. Sometimes other treatments are needed for deeper more aggressive types of melanoma.

- Excision, which is cutting out the affected area and then closing the wound with sutures (stitches)
- Sampling the local lymph nodes may be indicated (Sentinel lymph node biopsy)
- Mohs surgery is not used for the majority of melanoma but a variation (Slow Mohs) can be useful for certain types of thin melanomas
- Immune-mediated treatments (checkpoint inhibitors) are useful for advanced disease

After being diagnosed with a melanoma, your health care provider will discuss a plan of action that is based on your specific case. There is a subtype of melanoma called melanoma in situ (in-sigh-too) which is the thinnest form of melanoma. The prognosis is excellent and the stage of this type of skin cancer is considered to be Stage 0. About 50% of all melanoma cases are melanoma in situ.

What are the long-term effects?

Melanoma is a very serious diagnosis with a potentially fatal course if the lesion is large and rapidly growing. Nearly 90% of melanomas are thought to be caused by exposure to UV light and sunlight. It takes only one blistering sunburn, especially at a young age, to more than double a person's chance of developing melanoma later in life. You can help prevent melanoma by seeking shade whenever possible, wearing protective clothing, avoiding direct sunlight between 10am-4pm and using broad spectrum sunscreen with SPF of at least 30 every day.

<https://www.melanoma.org/understand-melanoma/what-melanoma/melanoma-facts-and-stats>