



Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common cancer affecting New Zealanders.

Skin cancers are often classified into two groups – melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers. Melanoma is the most serious skin cancer.

With any skin cancer, the earlier the diagnosis the higher the chance of successful treatment.

Melanoma

Melanoma is primarily caused by too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from either the sun or UV light eg, sun beds.

Melanoma is an aggressive form of skin cancer that can invade surrounding tissues and spread to other parts of the body.

New Zealand has one of the highest incidence rates of melanoma in the world.

While some skin types are more at risk of skin cancers (fair skinned, red heads or blondes), anyone exposed to excessive UV radiation is at risk of developing skin cancer including melanoma.

NZ Māori and Pacific peoples tend to have a lower chance of developing melanoma, but they can and still do get melanoma.

Getting sunburnt especially before the age of 20 years strongly increases the risk of melanoma.

Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers

Non-melanoma skin cancers are far more common than melanoma. The two main types are basal cell carcinomas (BCC) and squamous cell carcinomas (SCC).

BCC and SCC usually occur on areas of the skin that have been exposed to UV radiation. They tend to be caused by long-term exposure.

BCC is the most common and least serious form of skin cancer when treated early. It is more common in people aged over 50 but can also develop in younger people.

SCC is common in people over the age of 50. It can be more serious than BCC because it can spread to other parts of the body.

How to check for skin cancer?

Skin cancers can vary greatly in the way they look. If you are concerned about any skin changes, see your doctor as soon as possible.

The first sign of skin cancer is usually the appearance of a new spot or a change in an existing freckle or mole.

Check your entire body regularly (for example monthly), including skin not normally exposed to the sun.

Use a hand-held mirror or ask for help from someone else to check difficult areas, such as your back, neck and scalp. It's important to check areas like your armpits, inner legs, ears, eyelids, hands and feet. Check your scalp by using a comb to move hair aside.



SUNSMART

What are you looking for?

Melanoma

Look for any new or existing spots, freckles or moles that have changed in colour, shape or size. Often melanomas have an unusual shape or colour or a variety of colours.

Pay close attention to anything on your skin that's different from your other moles. Melanoma often stands out as 'the ugly duckling'.

Sometimes melanomas may be itchy or bleed. Some may quickly become raised and catch on clothing.

Nodular melanomas are an especially dangerous type of melanoma that grow quickly and need to be removed urgently. They are most often found on the head and neck and in older people, particularly men. They are raised, firm and often uniform in colour.

Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC) appears as a pale red or pearly smooth lump, usually on the face or neck.

Squamous cell cancer (SCC) often appears as a raised, crusty, non-healing sore. It is commonly found on the hands, forearms, ears, face or neck of people who have spent a lot of outdoors. SCC on the lips and ears has a high risk of spreading, so urgent treatment is needed. SCC can be life threatening if left untreated.

If you see something that's new, different from your other moles, or a mole that's changing, get it checked by a doctor without delay.

TREATMENT

Melanoma

Treatment for melanoma is most effective when the cancer is found and treated in its early stages, when it is still in the top or outer layer of skin. So it's important to get your doctor to check out any changes early.

Your doctor or a skin specialist will remove the melanoma by surgery. Although most people will only need surgery, those with advanced melanoma may also need radiotherapy and/or drug treatment.

Non-Melanoma Skin Cancers

Most BCC and SCC can be cured. These cancers are usually removed in a doctor's surgery. No further treatment is normally needed.

PREVENTION

Most skin cancers can be prevented by reducing your exposure to UV radiation, eg. by using sun protection and avoiding sunbeds.

To lower your risk of getting skin cancer:

Be SunSmart during September to April especially between 10am and 4pm when the sun's UV rays are most fierce.

SLIP into a shirt and into the shade.

SLOP on plenty of sunscreen at least 15 minutes before going outdoors.

- Use a broad-spectrum SPF30+ sunscreen.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours.

SLAP on a hat with a wide brim or a cap with flaps.

WRAP on a pair of wrap-around sunglasses.

For more information:

SunSmart: www.sunsmart.org.nz | Melanoma Foundation: www.melanoma.org.nz

Cancer Society: www.cancernz.org.nz | Melanoma booklet: www.nzgg.org.nz (search 'melanoma')



Melanoma



Nodular Melanoma

PHOTOS COURTESY OF:
Waikato DHB, DermNet NZ and the Cancer Society