

What is Skin Cancer?

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Maryland. One in five people will develop skin cancer. More than one million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed each year in the United States. There are three major types of skin cancer.

Basal Cell Carcinoma (cancer) is the most common type of skin cancer, usually appearing on the face and ears. It is slow growing and does not usually spread to distant parts of the body (metastasize). It is highly curable but if left untreated it can cause considerable disfigurement.

Squamous Cell Carcinoma is the second most common type of skin cancer, usually appearing on sun-exposed parts of the body. Squamous cell carcinoma is more aggressive than basal cell carcinoma, is more likely to spread and can cause death.

Melanoma is the least common type of skin cancer but the most dangerous. It is most likely to metastasize and therefore it is important to diagnose and treat this disease at an early stage. This year more than 1,000 Marylanders will be diagnosed with melanoma. In the United States about one person per hour dies from this often deadly but preventable disease.

The vast majority of skin cancer cases are caused by overexposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun. This is the same ultraviolet radiation found in tanning beds. Ultraviolet radiation (UVR), in the form of UVA and UVB rays, causes the pigment carrying cells in the skin (the melanocytes) to become more active, thus releasing more melanin to produce a tan or a burn. A few severe sunburns during childhood or adolescence doubles the risk of developing melanoma. You don't have to be very old to have melanoma; about one in four people who develop it are under the age of 40.

Who is at Risk?

Everyone is at some risk for developing skin cancer. Although people with lighter skin tones are at greater risk, people of all races and ethnic backgrounds are susceptible. In African-Americans melanoma may occur in lighter pigmented areas of the skin, such as the palms, the soles of the feet, or under the nails.

Risk factors for skin cancer include

- ☼ light skin that burns and freckles easily
- ☼ naturally red, blond, or light brown hair
- ☼ blue, gray, or green eyes
- ☼ many moles, irregular moles, or large moles
- ☼ blood relatives who have had skin cancer
- ☼ a history of sun exposure during outdoor work or play
- ☼ a history of sunburns as a child or adolescent

What Can You Do to Prevent Skin Cancer?

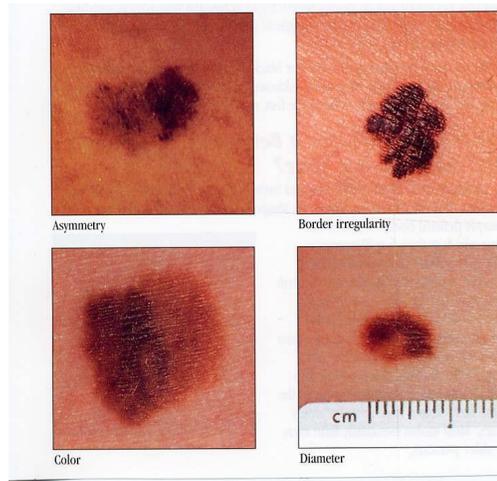
Protect yourself and your children by following these steps to SunGuard Your Skin:

- ☀ **Do Not Burn.** Avoid sun tanning and tanning beds. If you want to look tan use a sunless self-tanning product and use sunscreen too
- ☀ **Generously Apply Sunscreen** with SPF of at least 15, which provides broad-spectrum protection from both UVA and UVB rays. Re-apply every two hours and after swimming or sweating
- ☀ **Wear Protective Clothing** such as long-sleeved shirts, pants, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses with UV protection to prevent cataracts
- ☀ **Seek Shade** when appropriate, remembering that the sun's rays are strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- ☀ **Use Extra Caution** near water, snow and sand as they reflect the damaging UV rays, increasing your chance of sunburn
- ☀ **Send Sunscreen** to school or camp with your children and encourage them to use it
- ☀ **Remember** to follow these suggestions even on cloudy days and in every season of the year

Early Diagnosis is Key

Know your own skin. Skin self-examination should be done monthly in front of a mirror and/or with a partner. An ordinary mole is an evenly colored brown, tan or black spot on the skin. It is either flat or raised with a round or oval shape and sharply defined borders. If an existing mole or pigmented spot changes, consult your doctor. The American Cancer Society recommends that adults over age 40 be checked by a dermatologist yearly, especially if skin cancer risk factors are present.

Here's a simple ABCD rule to help you remember the warning signs of melanoma:



Asymmetry –One half does not match the other half

Border irregularity –The edges are ragged, notched or blurred

Color –The pigmentation is not uniform. Shades of tan, brown, and black are present.

Diameter –Greater than 6 millimeters. Any sudden or continuing increase in size should be of special concern.