

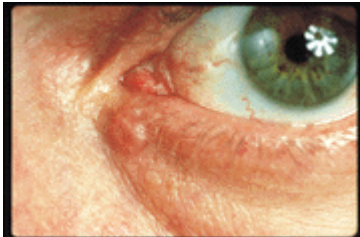
Skin cancer - early detection is critical

Each year in Australia, around 1,200 people die from skin cancer. Yet skin cancer is an almost totally preventable disease; 95 per cent of skin cancers are treatable if they are detected early. Regular checks of your skin should detect any suspicious lumps or spots as soon as they develop.

Three types of skin cancer

There are three types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma.

Basal cell carcinoma



This is the most common and least dangerous skin cancer. It appears as a lump or scaling area, and can be red, pale or pearly in colour. It grows slowly - usually on the head, neck or upper torso - and can become ulcerated as it grows.

Squamous cell carcinoma



These cancers grow over a period of weeks or months, and may spread to other parts of the body if not treated promptly. They occur most often (but not only) on areas exposed to the sun, such as the head, neck, hands and forearms. These cancers look like thickened, red scaly spots.

Melanoma



Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Each year, 700 Australians die from this disease. Melanoma is a particularly virulent form of skin cancer that is caused by sunburn during our early years. It develops over weeks to months and, if left untreated, can spread to other parts of the body, causing more serious and often fatal cancers.

Melanoma appears as a new spot or as an existing spot, freckle or mole that changes colour, size or shape. It usually has an irregular, smudgy outline and is often more than one colour. You can prevent melanoma by not getting sunburnt. Even mild sunburn can cause skin cell damage that can lead to melanoma.

Checking for skin cancers

Try to spend 15 minutes each season checking your skin, more often if you have suffered from severe sunburn or skin cancer. Through regular checking, you will get to know your skin and will notice any changes. Pay particular attention to your arms, legs, face, neck, back, shoulders and the back of your hands.

A skin cancer can be:

- A spot that looks different from others around it
- A new or unusual looking mole, freckle or sore
- A spot, mole or freckle that has changed in colour, shape or size
- A flat spot.

If you notice anything new or unusual on your skin, see your doctor.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- The Cancer Council Victoria Tel. 13 11 20.

Things to remember

- Skin cancer is almost totally preventable.
- Ninety-five per cent of skin cancers are treatable if detected early.
- Get into the habit of checking your skin regularly for signs of skin cancer.
- If you notice anything new or unusual on your skin, see your doctor.

Want to know more?

For references, related links and support group information, go to More information.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Cancer Council Victoria

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