Philadelphia Department of Public Health

Health Bulletin

Health tips and news for the community

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer. Most skin cancers are caused by too much exposure to sunlight or from indoor tanning beds. You can protect yourself and your family from skin cancer, or catch it early so that it can be treated. Anyone can get skin cancer, but the following groups are at the highest risk:

- *Fair-skinned people*
- *People with reduced immunity*
- *People who have had skin cancer before*
- *People with a family history of skin cancer*

Inside this issue:

- *Skin Cancer*
- *Dehydration and Heatstroke*

Finding skin cancer early is the best way to make sure it can be treated.

Types of skin cancer

There are 2 main types of skin cancers:

Basal and squamous cell skin cancers and Melanoma

Basal and squamous cell skin cancers:

- Strongly related to sun exposure.
- The most common cancers of the skin.
- Found mostly on parts of the body exposed to the sun, such as the head and neck.
- Less likely than melanoma to spread to other parts of the body and become life threatening.
- Can grow larger and invade nearby tissues and organs, causing scarring, deformity, or loss of function.
- Can spread if not treated, and in some cases they can even be fatal.

Melanoma:

- Starts in cells called melanocytes.
- Most likely to start on the chest, back, legs, neck and face.
- Not as common as basal cell and squamous cell skin cancers, but can be more serious.
- Almost always curable in early stages. If left alone, melanoma is more likely to spread to other parts of the body, where it can be very hard to treat.

Squamous Cell Skin Cancer

Basal Cell Skin Cancer

Melanoma

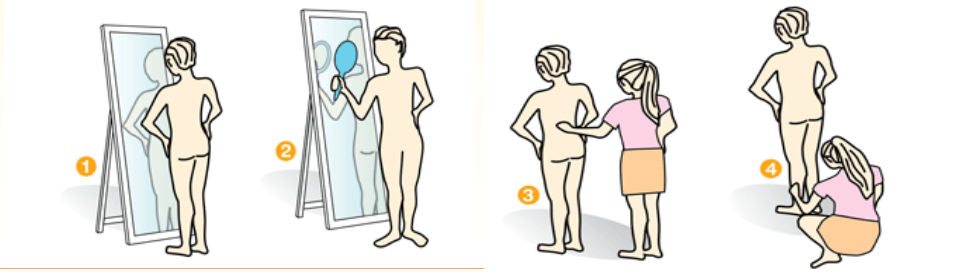
Stay in Touch with the Health Bulletin

You can find the Health Bulletin in many languages at
http://www.phila.gov/Health/DiseaseControl/healthBulletin.html
For more information about the Health Bulletin,
contact Marialisa Ramirez at 215-685-6496 or HealthBulletin@phila.gov

Skin exams

Most skin cancers can be found early with skin exams and treated. You should check your skin at least once per month and have your doctor check your skin regularly.

A skin self-exam should be done in a bright room in front of a full-length mirror. Use a hand-held mirror to look at areas that are hard to see, such as the backs of your thighs. Ask someone to help you check hard-to-see areas like your back or scalp. The first time you check your skin, spend time going over your entire body. Note the pattern of moles, freckles, and other marks on your skin so that you can notice any changes. Show your doctor any areas that concern you.



What should I look for?

A **normal mole** is a brown, tan, or black spot on the skin. It can be flat or raised, round or oval. Moles are usually less than the width of a pencil eraser. A mole can appear at birth or later in life. **New moles should be checked by a doctor.** Once a mole has developed, it will usually stay the same size, shape, and color. Some moles fade away with age.

Skin cancers can show up in many shapes and sizes. Look for:

- New growths
- Spots, bumps, patches, or sores that don't heal after several weeks
- Shaving cuts that don't heal in a few days sometimes turn out to be skin cancers, which often bleed easily. (They are not caused by shaving.)

Remember:

Most people have moles, and almost all moles are harmless. But it is important to notice changes in a mole, such as size, shape, or color. ***This may be a sign that melanoma is developing.***

Basal and squamous cell skin cancer both have the following characteristics:

- Flat, firm, pale or reddish areas of skin
- Small unusual bumps that may bleed after a minor injury
- May appear as a spot with, a lower area in their middle, and blue, brown, or black areas
- May develop as a flat area showing only slight changes from normal skin
- **Large basal cell carcinomas** may have oozing or crusted areas

What does melanoma look like?

- A new spot on the skin
- A spot that changes in size, shape, or color
- A spot that looks different from all of the other spots on your skin

If you have any of these warning signs, have your skin checked by a doctor.

How do I prevent skin cancer?

You do not have to avoid the sun completely, but too much sunlight can hurt you. Some people think about sun protection only when they spend a day at the beach or pool. But sun exposure adds up over time. Here are some steps you can take to prevent skin cancer:

- **Avoid tanning beds and sunlamps.** They give out UVA and usually UVB ray, which can cause long-term skin damage and can lead to skin cancer.
- **Seek shade.** Avoid being outdoors in the sun too long. Sunlight reflections from sand, water, and snow will increase the amount of sunlight you receive.
- **Protect your skin with clothing.** When out in the sun, wear clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
- **Use sunscreen.** Sunscreen protects skin from some of the sun's rays. Use sunscreen with sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher, and both UVA and UVB protection.
- **Wear a hat.** A hat with a 2 to 3 inch brim all around helps protect the ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp.
- **Wear sunglasses that block UV rays.** They help protect the eyes and the soft skin around the eyes.
- **Protect children from the sun.** Protect children from sun exposure by using the steps above. If you or your child burns easily, be extra careful to cover up, limit exposure, and apply sunscreen. Babies younger than 6 months should be kept out of direct sunlight and protected from the sun using hats and protective clothing. Sunscreen may be used on small areas of exposed skin only if adequate clothing and shade are not available.

For more information, visit: http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancercauses/sunanduvexposure/skin-cancer-facts

Dehydration and Heatstroke

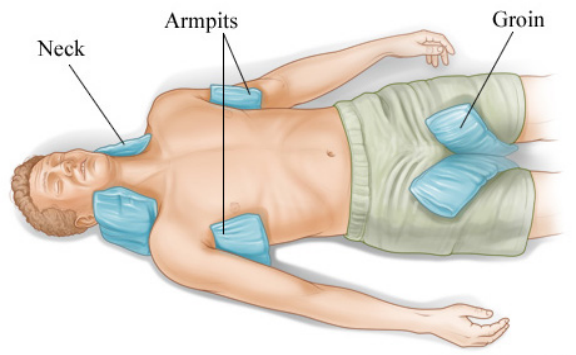
You have been outside all day long enjoying the nice weather, and your water bottle is empty. Suddenly you feel dizzy and lightheaded, and your mouth feels dry. You are dehydrated, meaning you have not had enough fluids. People can get dehydrated any time of year, but it's much more common in the summer.

Heatstroke is the most severe form of dehydration, where your internal temperature rises to dangerously high levels. Your skin gets hot, but you stop sweating. Someone with heatstroke may pass out, have hallucinations, or suffer seizures.

Simple tips to prevent dehydration and heatstroke:

- Drink plenty of water
- Take regular breaks in the shade
- Try to schedule most outdoor activities for early morning or eve-ning.

Do this when someone has more serious dehydration or heatstroke:

- Call 911
- Get them inside
- Have them lie down
- Cool them off with ice packs and cool cloths

Where to place ice packs and cool cloths