

Lifelines

from the National Cancer Institute



Enjoy the Sun with Caution -- Anyone Can Get Skin Cancer

by the National Cancer Institute

Summertime is here in many parts of the country. For many, this means weekends at the beach or picnics with family and friends. While it is OK to spend time outside, you need to know that people with darker skin – including many in the Hispanic community -- are at risk for developing skin cancer. Even if you do not have light skin, light-colored hair, and blue or green eyes, you are at risk for skin cancer. [Anyone can get skin cancer.](#)

Although skin cancer is less common among people with darker skin, it is often detected at later or advanced stages. In fact, data show that when Hispanics and other minority Americans are diagnosed with melanoma, the most severe form of skin cancer, it is usually at a later stage, when the disease is harder to treat and is less likely to be cured.

This later diagnosis occurs partly because many people—even doctors—had assumed that the pigment melanin in darker skin could protect against skin cancer, which is not true. Although melanin does help prevent sunburns, the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) rays can still damage skin.

The number of melanoma cases has been on the rise in the Hispanic community for decades. From 1992 to 2008, the number of new cases of melanoma each year increased by 19%, according to the National Cancer Institute’s, Surveillance Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) program.

A study led by the Cancer Institute of New Jersey that was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2013 found that Hispanics do not routinely protect their skin from the sun. The study looked at Hispanics in the Southern and Western U.S., and pointed out the need for additional education in the Hispanic community on the importance of protective behaviors when in the sun.

Yet, the sun isn’t the only cause of skin cancer. That’s why skin cancer may be found in places on your body that never see the sun. For example, you may be more likely to develop skin cancer if you come into contact with certain chemicals or poisons, have scars or skin ulcers, or use medicines, or develop medical conditions (such as HIV infection), that suppress the immune system. Although family history and genetics are risk factors for skin cancer in whites, there

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have not been enough genetic studies in people with darker skin to determine whether these are risk factors.

It is important to identify the signs and symptoms of skin cancer early

When skin cancer is found early, it can be treated more easily. A change on the skin is the most common sign of skin cancer. This may be any new mole or growth on the skin, a sore that doesn't heal, or a change in an old growth. Check the skin on all surfaces of your body, even in your mouth. Talk with your doctor if you see any changes on your skin that do not go away within a month.

There are steps you can take to protect yourself and prevent skin cancer

Avoid staying in the sun if you can—especially between 10 AM and 4 PM, when the sun's rays are strongest. If you work or play outside, you should wear clothes that cover your arms and legs, a hat that shades your face and ears, and sunglasses that filter out UV light to protect your eyes.

Use sunscreen that has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher. You should use sunscreen products that are labeled “broad spectrum,” which means they can filter out both UVA and UVB rays. Tanning beds, booths, and sunlamps also give off UV rays and should be avoided.

It doesn't matter whether you consider your skin light, dark, or somewhere in between—remember, anyone can get skin cancer. Start taking care of your skin today.

In 2011, the National Cancer Institute introduced a brochure that contains the facts you need to know to protect yourself from skin cancer. You can order *Anyone Can Get Skin Cancer* at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) or view it on <http://www.cancer.gov/anyone-can-get-skin-cancer>. Share it with your friends and family, so that you can all try to avoid skin cancer and stay healthy.

NCI leads the National Cancer Program and the NIH effort to dramatically reduce the burden of cancer and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families, through research into prevention and cancer biology, the development of new interventions, and the training and mentoring of new researchers. For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI web site at www.cancer.gov/espanol (or m.cancer.gov from your mobile device) or call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237). More articles and videos in the culturally relevant Lifelines series are available at www.cancer.gov/lifelines including a [video](#) about skin cancer for people with darker skin.