



Skin Cancer in the United States

The United States has the third highest rate of skin cancer in the world with almost one in five developing some form of skin cancer during their lives. More than 1 million cases of basal and squamous skin cancers and 68,720 cases of melanoma are expected in 2009. There are expected to be approximately 8,650 deaths from this disease.

Skin cancer is a disease that develops when the skin has been damaged by UV radiation from the sun. Children have delicate skin, which places them at particular risk of sunburn and skin damage. In fact, sun exposure during the first 15 years of life has a significant impact on the likelihood of developing skin cancer later in life.

There are three main types of skin cancer. Skin cancers are named after the type of cells they develop in and each type has different features. Basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma (known as non-melanoma skin cancers) are the most common types of skin cancer. Melanoma is the least common of the three but the most dangerous form of skin cancer.

Basal cell carcinoma

This type of cancer begins in the basal cell layer, the lowest layer of the epidermis. About 80% of all skin cancers are basal cell carcinomas. They usually begin on areas exposed to the sun. This type of cancer is slow to develop and usually doesn't spread to other areas of the body. Overexposure to the sun in children and teenagers typically results in basal cell carcinoma later in life.

Squamous cell carcinoma

This type of cancer begins in the upper layer of the epidermis. About 15% of all skin cancers are squamous cell carcinomas. They usually appear on areas exposed to the sun such as the ears, neck, lips, face, and hands. This type of cancer is slightly more likely to invade other parts of the body than basal cell carcinoma. Prevention and early detection greatly decrease the risk of this cancer.



Melanoma

This type of cancer begins in the melanocytes, which are pigment producing cells deep in the skin. About 4% of all skin cancers are melanomas. Melanoma is the most dangerous type of skin cancer because they are more likely to spread (metastasize) to other parts of the body if not detected early. The major cause of melanoma is overexposure to sunlight, especially when sunburn and blistering occurs. It is important to keep from burning and tanning when we are young, and to know the **warning signs of melanoma and seek help immediately**. Melanoma is the 6th most common cancer in males and the 7th most common cancer in females. Even those under 25 years old can be victims of melanoma and other skin cancers. **Melanoma can be curable if detected early.**

Unlike many other types of cancers, skin cancers give you early warning signs and can be removed before they become deadly. As a matter of fact, **there is a 95% cure rate for skin cancer if detected early.**