

CANCER INSTITUTE

Wayne State University



SKIN HEALTH

PROMOTING CANCER AWARENESS
& EARLY DETECTION

Taking Control of Your Health

Cancer is most curable in its early stages. At the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute, we know that routine screenings save lives every day. Take control of your health and talk with a health care provider to make an informed decision on which screenings are right for you.

Skin cancer basics

There are three major types of skin cancer: basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma. Basal cell and squamous cell cancers (non-melanomas) are the most common and usually develop on areas of the body most exposed to sun. They rarely spread to other parts of the body.

Melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer, begins in melanocytes — the cells that produce melanin, which gives skin its coloring. Melanoma occurs when melanocytes become cancerous. It can appear anywhere on the body, even areas not exposed to the sun.

Your chances of getting skin cancer

Each year, more than 2 million cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States, including more than 68,000 melanomas. Almost 12,000 deaths from skin cancer occur each year.

Melanoma is deadly for African-Americans and Latinos because it often goes undetected.

Common symptoms of skin cancer are:

- A change in the number, size, color or surface of a mole or darkly pigmented spot.
- A new growth or a sore that does not heal.
- The spread of pigmentation past the edge of a mole or mark.
- Moles with a change in sensation — itchiness, tenderness or pain.

Changes in your skin are not always a sign of cancer. It is important to see your health care provider if any changes last longer than two weeks.

Are you at risk?

Anyone can get skin cancer. You are at an increased risk if you have:

- Excessive and/or unprotected exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light, including natural sunlight, sun lamps and tanning booths.
- Fair skin that burns and blisters easily in the sun.
- Blond or red hair; blue, green or gray eyes.
- Worked with coal tar, pitch creosote, arsenic compounds or radium.
- A personal or family history of skin cancer.
- Have had even one sunburn as a child.
- Abnormal moles or a large number of moles on the body - more than 100 as an adult, 50 if under age 20.

Early detection can save your life

Skin cancer can be found early, increasing your chances of survival. The Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute recommends:

- A full-body skin exam for cancer as part of your yearly physical.
- Monthly skin self-exams.

It is extremely important to know your own pattern of moles, freckles and birthmarks. Be alert to changes in the number, size, shape or color of the spots on your skin.

When doing a self-exam, follow the “ABCD rule” for signs you should see a health care provider:

- **A** (Asymmetry) — one half of a mole or spot does not match the other half.
- **B** (Border) — the outside edge is irregular, ragged or scalloped, and not smooth.
- **C** (Color) — the color of the mole is not the same all over. There can be shades of black, brown, white, blue or red.
- **D** (Diameter) — the area is larger than an eraser on the end of a pencil (6mm), or is getting larger.

Lower your chances of getting skin cancer

You can help reduce your chances of getting skin cancer by:

- Staying in the shade between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun is strongest.
- Wearing a wide-brimmed hat, tightly woven clothes and UV blocking sunglasses.

- Avoiding getting sunburned.
- Using broad spectrum sunscreen, year round, with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 even on cloudy days.
- Applying two tablespoons (one ounce) of sun screen to your entire body 30 minutes before going outside. Re-apply every 2 hours.
- Avoiding sun lamps and tanning beds.
- Examining your skin, head-to-toe, every month.

Help your children prevent skin cancer

- Keep newborns out of the sun.
- Use sunscreen on children beginning at six months of age.
- Avoid use of aerosol sunscreens on children.

With our focus on multidisciplinary cancer research and care, the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute offers promising new treatments and prevention studies known as clinical trials. Contact us for more information.

The bottom line

- See a health care provider for a complete skin exam every year and discuss your chances of getting skin cancer.
- Learn the “ABCD rule” of skin self-exam and do it monthly.
- Protect yourself from the harmful effects of the sun.

*This information is intended to serve as a guideline only. Screening needs vary for each individual depending on your overall cancer risk. Please consult with a health care professional to decide which screenings are right for you and to make an informed decision.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to learn more about any of these topics, please visit karmanos.org. To make an appointment or to reach the Patient & Community Education department call Karmanos at 1-800-527-6266. Reliable information is also available from the following sources:

American Cancer Society
877-ACS-2345
Cancer.org



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National Cancer Institute's
Cancer Information Service
800-4-CANCER cancer.org

1-800-KARMANOS
karmanos.org

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