



Prevention and Early Detection

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Skin Cancer Facts

Most of the more than 1 million cases of nonmelanoma skin cancer diagnosed yearly in the United States are considered to be sun-related. Melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, will account for about 59,600 cases of skin cancer in 2005 and most (about 7,800) of the 10,600 deaths due to skin cancer each year.

Melanoma in the United States – 2005 Estimates

New Cases	59,600
Deaths Per Year	7,800
5-Year Localized Survival Rate*	98%
5-Year Overall Survival Rate*	91%

* The 5-year survival rates represent persons who are living 5 years after diagnosis, whether disease-free, in remission, or under treatment. They do not imply that 5-year survivors have been permanently cured of cancer. Localized cancer represents cancer that, at the time of diagnosis, had not spread to additional sites within the body. Typically the earlier a cancer is detected and diagnosed, the more successful the treatment, thus enhancing the survival rate.

For localized melanoma, the 5-year survival rate is 98%; survival rates for regional and distant stage diseases are 60% and 14%, respectively. About 83% of melanomas are diagnosed at a localized stage

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the skin? The skin is the largest organ of the body. It covers the internal organs and protects them from injury, serves as a barrier between microbes, such as bacteria, and internal organs, and prevents the loss of too much water and other fluids. The skin regulates body temperature and helps rid the body of excess water and salts. Certain cells in the skin communicate with the brain and allow for temperature, touch, and pain sensations.

What is nonmelanoma (basal or squamous cell) skin cancer? Most skin cancers are classified as nonmelanoma, usually occurring in either basal cells or squamous cells. These cells are located at the base of the outer layer of the skin or cover the internal and external surfaces of the body.

Most nonmelanoma skin cancers develop on sun-exposed areas of the body, like the face, ear, neck, lips, and the backs of the hands. Depending on the type, they can be fast or slow growing, but they rarely spread to other parts of the body.

What is melanoma skin cancer? Melanoma is a cancer that begins in the melanocytes – the cells that produce the skin coloring or pigment known as melanin. Melanin helps protect the deeper layers of the skin from the harmful effects of the sun.

Melanoma is almost always curable when it is detected in its early stages. Although melanoma accounts for only a small percentage of skin cancer, it is far more dangerous than other skin cancers, and it causes the majority of skin cancer deaths.

How many people are affected by skin cancer? Skin cancer is the most common of all cancers. It accounts for nearly half of all cancers in the United States. More than 1 million cases of nonmelanoma skin cancer are found in this country each year. The American Cancer Society estimates that about 59,600 new melanomas will be diagnosed in the United States during 2005.

Who survives skin cancer? For basal cell or squamous cell cancers, a cure is highly likely if detected and treated early. Melanoma, even though it can spread to other body parts quickly, is also highly curable if detected early and treated properly. The 5-year relative survival rate for patients with melanoma is 91%. For localized melanoma, the 5-year survival rate is 98%; survival rates for regional and distant stage diseases are 60% and 16% respectively. About 83% of melanomas are diagnosed at a localized stage.

How many people will die from skin cancer? The American Cancer Society estimates there will be about 10,600 deaths from skin cancer in 2005 – 7,800 from melanoma and 2,800 from other skin cancers.

What are the risk factors for skin cancer? Risk factors for nonmelanoma and melanoma skin cancers include:

- unprotected and/or excessive exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation
- fair complexion
- occupational exposures to coal tar, pitch, creosote, arsenic compounds, or radium
- family history
- multiple or atypical moles
- severe sunburns as a child

What are the signs and symptoms of skin cancer? Skin cancer can be found early, and both doctors and patients play important roles in finding skin cancer. If you have any of the following symptoms, tell your doctor.

- any change on the skin, especially in the size or color of a mole or other darkly pigmented growth or spot, or a new growth
- scaliness, oozing, bleeding, or change in the appearance of a bump or nodule
- the spread of pigmentation beyond its border such as dark coloring that spreads past the edge of a mole or mark
- a change in sensation, itchiness, tenderness, or pain

Can skin cancer be prevented? The best ways to lower the risk of nonmelanoma skin cancer are to avoid intense sunlight for long periods of time and to practice sun safety. You can continue to exercise and enjoy the outdoors while practicing sun safety at the same time.

- Avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Seek shade: Look for shade, especially in the middle of the day when the sun's rays are strongest. Practice the shadow rule and teach it to children. If your shadow is shorter than you, the sun's rays are at their strongest.
- Slip on a shirt: Cover up with protective clothing to guard as much skin as possible when you are out in the sun. Choose comfortable clothes made of tightly woven fabrics that you cannot see through when held up to a light.
- Slap on sunscreen: Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Apply a generous amount (about a palmful) and reapply after swimming, toweling dry, or perspiring. Use sunscreen even on hazy or overcast days.
- Slap on a hat: Cover your head with a wide-brimmed hat, shading your face, ears, and neck. If you choose a baseball cap, remember to protect your ears and neck with sunscreen.
- Wear sunglasses with 99% to 100% UV absorption to provide optimal protection for the eyes and the surrounding skin.
- Follow these practices to protect your skin even on cloudy or overcast days. UV rays travel through clouds.

What Is the American Cancer Society Doing About Skin Cancer?

- **Education:** The Society delivers health information to the public, so that individuals can make informed personal decisions. Examples include: Printed materials, media coverage, community-based outreach programs, and free, nationwide services such as www.cancer.org and 1-800-ACS-2345. The American Cancer Society also began its Sun Safe Community initiative in December 2000 to help prevent skin cancer. This community-based, multi-component effort consists of prevention programs at schools, childcare centers, primary care offices, and beach and recreation areas.
- **Advocacy:** With the help of grassroots volunteers in communities across the country, the Society advocates with lawmakers at both the state and federal levels to ensure responsible health policies are enacted and to increase funding for research and testing and treatment coverage.
- **Service:** The Society works to improve quality of life for people living with cancer through a variety of support services and programs helping patients and families cope with the disease.
- The Society also has [collaborations with many nationwide organizations](#) to promote skin cancer prevention, education, and sun-safe policies.

Revised: 04/05/2005