

# MELANOMA

## WHAT IT IS

Melanoma is a form of skin cancer. The pigment-producing cells in the outer layer of the skin grow out of control and form a tumour.

## RISK FACTORS

**People more likely to develop melanoma have:**

- Fair, sun-sensitive skin that burns rather than tans; freckles; red or blond hair
- Many moles — more than 50
- Moles that are large or unusual in colour or shape
- Close family history of melanoma, or a personal history of melanoma
- Excessive exposure to UV from the sun or tanning beds
- History of severe sunburns

## PREVENTION

- Find out your risk — the risk factors are well known.
- Learn the early signs of melanoma; find out why and how to check your skin.
- Protect yourself from the sun, and avoid tanning beds.
- Check your skin monthly. Ask a friend or family member to help with checking your skin in places you might not be able to see.
- Consult a doctor if you see any suspicious spots.



## CAUSES

**Excessive exposure to ultraviolet (UV) from the sun and tanning beds plays a leading role in the development of melanoma and is the most preventable cause. Experts estimate about 90% of melanomas are associated with severe UV exposure and sunburns over a lifetime.**



## APPEARANCE

Melanoma can develop in weeks, months or years. It can appear as a new mole or freckle-like spot on the skin, or develop in an existing mole. Melanomas are usually dark brown or black, although some show a mixture of colours including blue, grey and red.

While melanoma is less common in darker-skinned people, it can appear on soles of the feet, toenails and palms of the hands.

Melanomas look different from all other moles. Generally, only one melanoma appears at a time, so look out for a spot that looks or feels different, or changes differently compared to other moles on the body.

## TREATMENT

If a suspicious spot or mole is found, see your doctor or Certified Dermatologist as soon as possible to have the lesion examined. A **skin biopsy** under local anesthesia may be needed. If the biopsy confirms melanoma, further **surgery** will be needed to remove cancer cells that may still exist at the melanoma site.

The main factor in determining treatment is the depth of the melanoma in the skin, as measured by a pathologist (Breslow index). The deeper the cancer, the more likely it has spread and the likelier it is to recur. Depending on the depth, a **lymph-node biopsy** is often suggested to test for cancer cells in the lymph node closest to the melanoma.

Additional treatments that may be used during treatment depending on the stage of the melanoma include: **chemotherapy**, **biological therapy** (or immunotherapy), **targeted therapy** and **radiation therapy**.

## THE ABCDE'S OF MELANOMA



**A**

### Asymmetry

The shape on one side is different from that on the other side.



**B**

### Border

The border or visible edge is irregular, ragged and imprecise.



**C**

### Colour

There is a colour variation, with brown, black, red, grey or white within the lesion.



**D**

### Diameter

Growth is typical of melanoma. It can measure more than 6 mm, although it can be less.



**E**

### Evolution

Look for change in colour, size, shape or symptom, such as itching, tenderness or bleeding.

