

SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA

WHAT IT IS

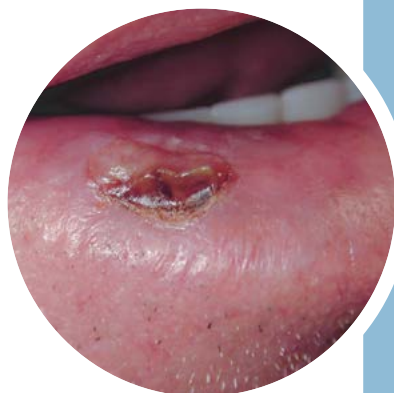
Squamous cell carcinoma (also referred to as SCC) is the second most common form of skin cancer in Canada and the most common form of skin cancer in Black Canadians. Squamous cell carcinoma can develop from a precancerous growth or “sunspot” called an actinic keratosis. These actinic keratoses are rough, scaly growths ranging in colour from skin colored, pink to brown. They are found on sun-exposed parts of the body and can often be felt before they become visible. Up to one in 10 can become squamous cell carcinomas, sometimes within two years.



RISK FACTORS

Fair-skinned people who freckle and burn easily are at greatest risk of squamous cell carcinoma. People who work outdoors or have hobbies with significant sun exposure (such as golfing, gardening and sailing) face an increased risk because of their extensive sun exposure.

In addition, people who have a weakened immune system (immunosuppressed) because of medications or organ transplantation (e.g. kidney, liver, heart, lung), as well as those with a blood cancers (e.g. CLL) are at a significantly higher risk for the development of squamous cell skin cancers.



APPEARANCE

Squamous cell skin cancers appear as thickened, red scaly bumps or wart-like growths. They may also look like an open sore or crusted skin. Sometimes they can become very painful to touch. This type of skin cancer may grow quickly over a period of a few weeks or more slowly over months.

Squamous cell carcinoma can occur on any part of the body but is most common on areas exposed to the sun such as the head, face, neck, shoulders, and extremities (i.e. arms, legs, backs of hands).

CAUSES

Chronic exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun or from tanning beds is the leading cause of squamous cell carcinoma. This exposure causes certain cells in the skin's outer layer to grow out of control and become a tumour. Squamous cell carcinoma can also develop where the skin has been damaged by x-rays, chronic ulcers, burns, and some highly inflammatory rashes. It is not contagious.

PREVENTION

The best way to avoid developing squamous cell carcinoma is to take steps to avoid unnecessary exposure to ultraviolet radiation including:

- Staying in the shade
- Wearing a wide-brimmed hat
- Sunglasses and sun-protective clothing
- Avoiding the sun from 10am to 4pm when the rays are the strongest

TREATMENT

When detected early and treated promptly, squamous cell carcinoma is almost always curable and causes minimal damage. Treatment options depend on your age and medical condition, as well as the nature of the tumour (size, location, subtype).

Some treatment options include:

- **Surgical excision:** Removing the cancer surgically then suturing the area closed
- **Electrodessication and curettage:** Where the cancer is removed by scraping and cauterizing the skin

For more complicated tumours or those that arise on the head, neck, hands, feet or genitals, a specialized form of surgery called **Mohs surgery** is used. Performed by a Certified Dermatologist trained in this technique, Mohs surgery has a high success rate. It is indicated for tumors in sensitive areas or tumors that are recurrent. Occasionally, radiation is used to treat squamous cell carcinoma.



Additional information on Squamous Cell Carcinoma is available online.

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All content for this brochure was developed independently by Canadian Certified Dermatologists.