

Teachers and parents, here is an excellent resource! <http://www.skincancer.org/prevention/education-program/rays-awareness>

What is cancer?

Our body consists of cells. Normal cells grow, multiply and die in an orderly manner and are replaced by new cells. Cancer cells do not die but continue to multiply in a disorderly manner. Over time they can form a mass that may be malignant, in other words cancerous.

What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer can occur anywhere on the skin. The three most common types of skin cancer are *basal cell carcinoma*, *squamous cell carcinoma* and *malignant melanoma*. Skin cancer is the most common cancer worldwide.

Skin Facts

The skin is the largest organ of the body. It helps to protect our internal organs from injury and harmful germs such as bacteria. It also helps to regulate fluids and control body temperature.

The skin has three layers and several different types of cells

What are the risk factors for skin cancer?

A risk factor is anything that increases your chance of getting a disease.

The most common risk factor for skin cancer is exposure to *ultraviolet (UV) radiation*. Sunlight is the main form of UV radiation. In the Cayman Islands where we have year-round, bright sunlight, we are at particularly high risk.

Skin Colour is a risk factor. People having light coloured skin at greater risk than those with darker skin. This is because people with darker skin have more *melanin*, a skin pigment that offers a protective effect.

Any change in skin colour from your natural skin colour is a sign that damage has occurred.

If you have blond or red hair, have many freckles, blue eyes and sunburn easily you are at greater risk for skin cancer than someone with darker skin that rarely gets sunburned.

Men are more likely to get skin cancer than women are and the *older* you are the greater your risk.

There is some evidence to suggest that *family history* is a contributory factor. One reason for this could be shared lifestyles.

Prior history of skin cancer – if you have been diagnosed with any type of skin cancer it is likely that you will be diagnosed with another skin cancer at some point in the future, usually within five years.

There are other risk factors for skin cancer including exposure to chemicals such as arsenic; radiation exposure, particularly if you received radiation therapy for treatment for some other type of cancer and other medical conditions

What can I do to lower my risk of skin cancer?

The number 1 thing you can do to prevent skin cancer is to limit your UV exposure. While this can be difficult living here in Cayman there are things you can do to minimize your risk.

- ü Stay indoors between 10am and 4pm
- ü If you have to be outdoors, seek the shade.
- ü Additionally protect your skin with clothing that covers as much of your body as possible.
 - ü Wear a hat with a wide brim that will protect your face, neck, nose, ears and scalp.
 - ü Wear wrap-around sunglasses that have at least 99% UV absorption. This includes sunglasses labeled “UV absorption up to 400nm” and “Meets ANSI UV Requirements”.
 - ü Use sunscreen and lip balm with a minimum SPF of 30 on all sun exposed areas of the body but not in your eyes. Sunscreen should be applied before you leave the house and reapplied regularly throughout the day especially if you have been swimming or if you have sweat excessively.

Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)

This is the most common type of skin cancer – about 80% of all incidences. This type of cancer is also the least deadly, being relatively slow growing, although if left untreated it can spread to other parts of the body with deadly consequences.

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, it can appear as a shiny translucent or pearly nodule, a sore that continuously heals and then re-opens, a pink slightly elevated growth, reddish irritated patches of skin, or a waxy scar.

BCC usually appears on sun-exposed areas of the skin and in particular, the head face and neck. These types of cancer can recur in the same spot after they have initially been removed.

Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)

This type of skin cancer is more aggressive than BCC and accounts for about 16% of all diagnoses of skin cancer. They usually form on sun-exposed areas such as the face, head, neck as well as the back of the hands. They often develop from *actinic keratoses* which are dry, scaly lesions that may be skin-coloured, reddish-brown or yellowish-black.

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, it often appears as a crusted or scaly area of skin with a red inflamed base that resembles a growing tumour, non-healing ulcer, or crusted-over patch of skin.

Malignant Melanoma

This is the least common but most deadly form of skin cancer often spreading to the lymph system and other parts of the body.

Melanoma often forms in a pre-existing mole or looks like a new mole. It forms most commonly on sun-exposed areas such as the face, head and neck and additionally on the legs of women and the trunk on men. It can also appear under a nail. Melanoma is usually brown or black in colour, but sometimes, though rare, may be red, skin-coloured, or white.

When looking at the skin it is helpful to remember the ABCDE rule:

Asymmetry: One half does not match the other half.

Border: The edges are irregular, blotched or blurred.

Colour: The colour is not uniform and there are shades of brown, black, red, pink, blue, white.

Diameter – the growth is greater than 6mm wide – wider than the eraser at the end of a pencil.

Elevation / Evolution: The mole is of different heights and is changing in size, shape or colour.

Facts and Myths Associated with Skin Cancer:

- **I do not need to protect my skin if the sun is not shining.**

This is a MYTH. Protection is important everyday of the year, even on cloudy days, so remember to always protect your skin.

- **Sunscreen never expires.**

This is a MYTH. Sunscreen is an over the counter medication and the maximum shelf life is 3 years.

- **Tans are a sign of good health.**

This is a MYTH. Tanned skin is damaged skin.

- **One bad sunburn will increase my risk of developing cancer.**

This is TRUE.