



# Skin Cancer Prevention and Education Resource Guide May 2025

The Maryland Department of Health's Center for Cancer Prevention and Control is sharing this guide with the local Cigarette Restitution Fund-Cancer Prevention, Education, Screening, and Treatment programs to assist in the development of skin cancer awareness materials.

This guide provides information and materials from reputable sources including but not limited to, the American Cancer Society (ACS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Cancer Institute (NCI), and George Washington University Cancer Institute. Resources include ready-made media such as factsheets, social media, and videos to help you create, update, and tailor health education materials for the communities you serve.



Funded by the Cigarette Restitution Fund

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>What is Skin Cancer?</b>	<b>Pg. 3</b>
<b>What are the Signs and Symptoms of Skin Cancer?</b>	<b>Pg. 4</b>
<b>What are the ABCDEs of Skin Cancer?</b>	<b>Pg. 5</b>
<b>What are the Risk Factors for Skin Cancer?</b>	<b>Pg. 6</b>
<b>How Can You Lower Your Risk of Skin Cancer?</b>	<b>Pg. 7</b>
<b>What are the Harms of Tanning?</b>	<b>Pg. 8</b>
<b>Sample Messaging for Social Media</b>	<b>Pg. 9</b>
<b>Ready-Made Media</b>	<b>Pg. 10-11</b>

## What is Skin Cancer?

Skin cancer is a disease in which cells in the skin grow out of control. Normally, as skin cells grow old and die, new cells form to replace them, but this process does not work as it should and the cells can grow quickly and uncontrollably. Most cases of skin cancer are caused by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun, tanning beds, or sunlamps.

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States with 1 in 5 Americans developing skin cancer by the age of 70. Anyone can get skin cancer, but some people have a higher risk.

The skin is the body's largest organ and has several layers. The two main layers are the epidermis (upper or outer layer) and the dermis (lower or inner layer). Skin cancer begins in the epidermis, which is made up of three kinds of cells:

- **Squamous cells** which are thin, flat cells that form the top layer of the epidermis.
- **Basal cells** which are round cells under the squamous cells.
- **Melanocytes** which are cells that make melanin and are found in the lower part of the epidermis.

Basal and squamous cell carcinomas are the two most common types of skin cancer. Melanoma, the third most common type of skin cancer, causes the most deaths because it tends to spread to other parts of the body like the brain and the liver.

If skin cancer is caught early, your dermatologist can treat it with little to no scarring and there's a greater chance of getting rid of the cancer entirely.

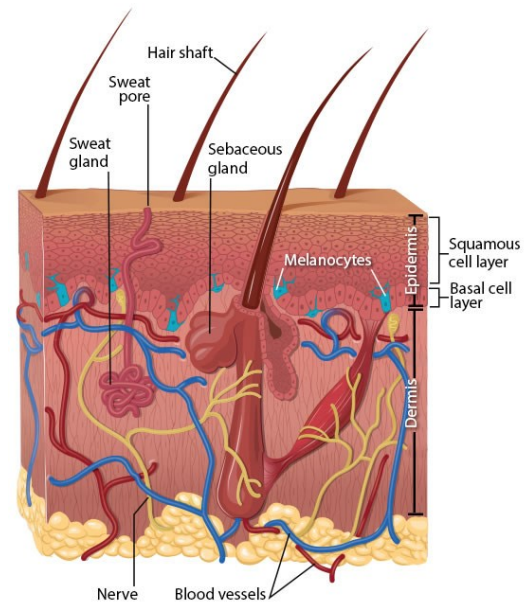


Figure 1: Skin and Hair Diagram<sup>1</sup>

### References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, Jul 1). *Skin Cancer Basics*. <https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/about/index.html>.
2. Skin Cancer Foundation. (2024, Feb). *Skin Cancer Facts & Statistics*. <https://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/skin-cancer-facts/>
3. Skin Cancer Foundation. (2025, Jan). *Skin Cancer 101*. <https://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/>
4. Cleveland Clinic. (2023, May 3). *Skin Cancer*. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15818-skin-cancer>

## What are the Signs and Symptoms of Skin Cancer?

The most common warning signs of skin cancer are changes on your skin like a new growth or a change in an existing growth or mole. Symptoms include:

- A new mole or a mole that changes in size, shape/color, or that bleeds
- A pearly or waxy bump on your face, ears, or neck
- A flat, pink/red or brown-colored patch or bump
- Areas on your skin that look like scars
- Sores that look crusty, have a depression in the middle or bleed often
- A wound or sore that won't heal, or that heals but comes back again
- A rough, scaly lesion that might itch, bleed and become crusty

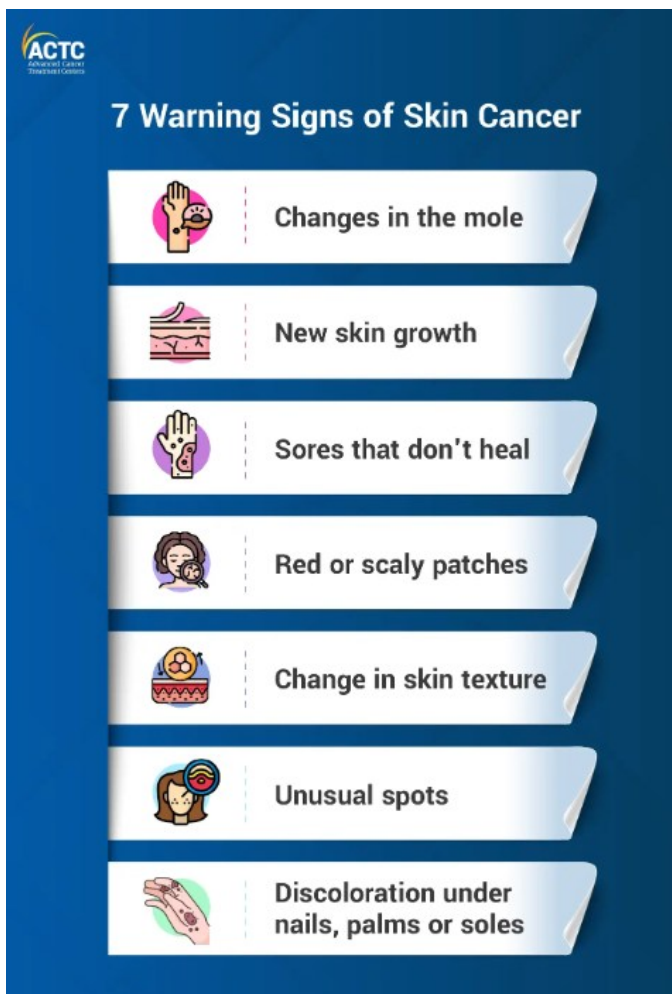


Figure 2: 7 Warning Signs of Cancer<sup>3</sup>



Figure 3: Spot the Signs of Skin Cancer<sup>4</sup>

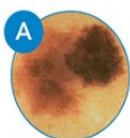
### References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, Jul 1). *Symptoms of Skin Cancer*. <https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/symptoms/index.html>
2. Cleveland Clinic. (2023, May 3). *Skin Cancer*. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15818-skin-cancer>
3. Advanced Cancer Treatment Centers. (2023, Nov 7). *The Truth About Skin Cancer: Debunking Common Myths*. <https://actchealth.com/blogs/the-truth-about-skin-cancer-debunking-common-myths>
4. Shelby County Reporter. (2024, Jul 18). *Skin Cancer Is in Style This Summer. Protect Yourself to Buck the Trend*. <https://shelbycountyreporter.storymd.com/story/kqr2x6Ujq-skin-cancer-is-in-style-this-summer-protect-yourself-to-buck-the-trend>

## What are the ABCDEs of Skin Cancer?

You may have heard to follow the “ABCDEs of skin cancer”. Healthcare providers recommend this way of examining your skin for signs of melanoma or other skin cancers. Look for the following:

- **“A” is for asymmetrical.** Does the mole or spot have an irregular shape with two parts that look very different?
- **“B” is for border.** Is the border irregular or jagged?
- **“C” is for color.** Is the color uneven?
- **“D” is for diameter.** Is the mole or spot larger than the size of a pea?
- **“E” is for evolving.** Has the mole or spot changed during the past few weeks or months?



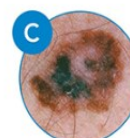
### A is for Asymmetry

One half of the spot is unlike the other half.



### B is for Border

The spot has an irregular, scalloped, or poorly defined border.



### C is for Color

The spot has varying colors from one area to the next, such as shades of tan, brown, or black, or areas of white, red, or blue.



### D is for Diameter

While melanomas are usually greater than 6 millimeters, or about the size of a pencil eraser, when diagnosed, they can be smaller.



### E is for Evolving

The spot looks different from the rest or is changing in size, shape, or color.

Figure 4: ABCDEs of Melanoma<sup>2</sup>

#### References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, Jul 1). *Symptoms of Skin Cancer*. <https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/symptoms/index.html>
2. American Academy of Dermatology Association. (n.d.). *What to Look For: ABCDEs of Melanoma*. <https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/skin-cancer/find/at-risk/abcde>
3. Cleveland Clinic. (2024, Nov 15). *ABCDEs of Skin Cancer*. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diagnostics/8648-skin-self-exam>



## What are the Risk Factors for Skin Cancer?

- **Ultraviolet (UV) light** exposure is a major risk for most melanomas and sunlight is the main source of UV rays. Tanning beds and sun lamps are also sources of UV rays. UV rays are the main cause of the damaging effects of the sun on the skin. UV rays damages the DNA inside skin cells that can then affect the genes that control skin cell growth.
- **People with these physical characteristics are at greater risk:**
  - ◇ A lighter natural skin color
  - ◇ Skin that burns, freckles, reddens easily, or becomes painful in the sun
  - ◇ Blue or green eyes
  - ◇ Blond or red hair
- **Certain types and a large number of moles.** Most moles will not cause any issues, but someone who has many moles is more likely to develop melanoma.
- **A family history of skin cancer.** Your risk of melanoma is higher if one or more of your first-degree relatives (parents, siblings, children) have had melanoma. Around 1 in 10 people with melanoma have a family history of it. This can be because of a shared lifestyle of frequent sun exposure, lighter tone complexion, gene changes that run in the family, or a combination of all these factors.
- **A personal history of skin cancer.** A person who has already had melanoma has a higher risk of getting it again. For people who have had several melanomas or got it at a young age, health care providers may advise getting genetic counseling and testing to see they have a gene mutation that increases their risk.
- **Older age.** The risk of melanoma increases as you get older, but it can still develop in younger people. Melanoma is one of the most common cancers in people younger than 30 years.
- **Having a weakened immune system.** Your immune system helps your body fight off illnesses like cancer on the skin or other organs. People that have weakened immune systems are more likely to develop skin cancer.
- **Sex at birth.** In the United States, men are more likely than women to get melanoma. However, before the age of 50, the risk is higher for women; after the age of 50, the risk is higher in men.

### References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, Jul 1). *Skin Cancer Risk Factors*. [https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/risk-factors/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic\\_info/risk\\_factors.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/risk-factors/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/risk_factors.htm)
2. American Cancer Society. (2023, Oct 27). Risk Factors for Melanoma Skin Cancer. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/melanoma-skin-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html>

## **How Can You Lower Your Risk of Skin Cancer?**

To lower your risk of getting skin cancer, protect your skin from UV rays from the sun and artificial sources like tanning beds and sunlamps.

- **Practice sun safety.** Protection from UV rays is important year-round and not just in the summer. UV rays can reach you on cloudy and cool days and can reflect off surfaces like water, cement, sand, and snow. UV rays are strongest from 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- **Avoid indoor tanning.** Indoor tanning exposes you to higher levels of UV rays and over time with too much exposure it can lead to skin cancer, cataracts, and cancers in the eye.
- **Wear sun-protective clothing.** Wear something lightweight and a long-sleeve shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses with UV protection. You could also look for clothing that is specially sold with UV protection factor (UPF).
- **Apply a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher.**
  - ◇ Wear sunscreen whenever you are going to be outside, even on a cloudy day.
  - ◇ Most adults need at minimum of 1 ounce of sunscreen to fully cover all exposed skin. Depending on your body size you may need more sunscreen to protect your exposed skin.
  - ◇ Don't forget to apply to the tops of your feet, your neck, your ears, and the top of your head!
  - ◇ Reapply sunscreen every two hours or after swimming or sweating.
- **Consider using a self-tanning product** if you want to keep the tanned-look but continue to use sunscreen with it.
- **Perform regular skin self-exams** to detect skin cancer early when it is most treatable and see a dermatologist if you notice any new or suspicious spots on your skin.

### **References**

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, Jul 1). *Reducing Risk for Skin Cancer*. [https://www.cdc.gov/skincancer/prevention/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic\\_info/prevention.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/skincancer/prevention/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/prevention.htm)
2. American Academy of Dermatology Association. (2025, Jan 31). *How To Prevent Skin Cancer*. <https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/skin-cancer/prevent/how>.

## What are the Harms of Tanning?

Did you know that there is no such thing as a safe tan? The increase in melanin, which causes the tan color change in your skin, is a sign of damage. When your skin is exposed to UV radiation, it produces more melanin in an attempt to protect your skin from more damage.

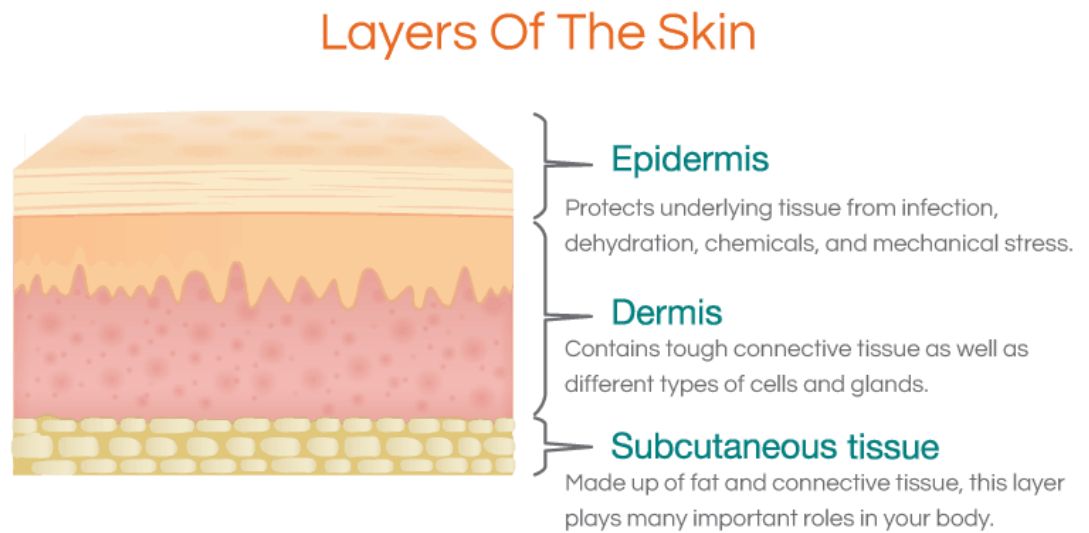


Figure 5: Layers of the Skin<sup>3</sup>

Indoor tanning is also dangerous and is not a safe alternative to sunlight. Indoor tanning leads to a 75% increased risk of developing life-threatening melanoma if you start using indoor tanning beds before age 35.

Tanning greatly increases your risk of developing skin cancer and it does not protect your skin from sunburn or other skin damage. In fact, the extra melanin in tanned skin only has an SPF of about 2 to 4 which is far below the recommended SPF of 30 or higher. Tanning can cause

- premature aging,
- skin cancer,
- actinic or solar keratoses,
- photokeratitis (sunburn of the cornea), or
- cataracts (clouding of the natural lens of the eye).

There are two phases of a sunburn: the immediate and the delayed. Immediate sunburn causes the skin to turn a slight pink color. This is the first warning that your skin is getting too much UV exposure. Delayed sunburn is deeper and more severe damage. Due to the depth of the damage, you sometimes don't see the burn until hours later. Severe sunburns can cause enough inflammation to make you feel sick and nauseous.

### References

1. U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2023, May 16). *The Risk of Tanning*. <https://www.fda.gov/radiation-emitting-products/tanning/risks-tanning>
2. Skin Cancer Foundation. (2025, Apr). *Tanning & Your Skin*. <https://www.skincancer.org/risk-factors/tanning/#vitamin-d>
3. AIM at Melanoma Foundation. (n.d.). *What Are the Dangers of Outdoor Tanning?* <https://www.aimatmelanoma.org/melanoma-101/prevention/dangers-of-tanning-and-burning/>



## **Sample Messaging for Social Media**

### **English**

Sometimes a simple skin check can save your life. Take a few minutes every month to check your skin.

### **Spanish/Español**

A veces una simple revisión de la piel puede salvarte la vida. Dedica unos minutos cada mes a revisar tu piel.

### **English**

Early detection is key! Melanomas are the deadliest type of skin cancer. Examine your body once a month to look for new moles or changes in ones you already have. It's quick and easy!

### **Spanish/Español**

¡La detección temprana es clave! Los melanomas son el tipo de cáncer de piel más mortal. Examina tu cuerpo una vez al mes para detectar lunares nuevos o cambios en los que ya tienes. ¡Es rápido y sencillo!

### **English**

Melanoma stands out.

Check your skin.

You could spot cancer.

### **Spanish/Español**

El melanoma es evidente.

Revisa tu piel.

Podrías detectar cáncer.

### **English**

Tanning beds are more harmful to your skin than the sun. Using a tanning bed before the age of 35 increases your risk of melanoma by 75%! If you really want a tan, try an alternative like a spray tan or self-tan lotion. #PracticeSunSafety

### **Spanish/Español**

Las camas solares son peores para la piel que el sol. Usando una cama solar antes de los 35 años aumenta el riesgo de melanoma hasta 75%. Si quieres broncearte, prueba una alternativa como el bronceado en aerosol o la loción autobronceadora. #PracticaLaSeguridadSolar

### **English**

You still need sunscreen on a cloudy day! The sun's harmful UV rays can damage your skin even when it's cloudy. Stay safe by always wearing sunscreen when you are outdoors. #PracticeSunSafety

### **Spanish/Español**

Necesitas protector solar en un día nublado. Los rayos UV del sol pueden dañar tu piel incluso en días nublados. Protégete usando protector solar cuando salgas afuera. #PracticaLaSeguridadSolar

#### **References**

1. Oregon Health & Science University. (n.d.). *Social Media Toolkit*. <https://www.ohsu.edu/war-on-melanoma/social-media-toolkit>
2. Wisconsin Cancer Collaborative. (n.d.). *Social Media Toolkit: Sun Safety*. <https://wicancer.org/resources/social-media-toolkits/social-media-toolkit-sun-safety/>

## Ready-Made Media

### Factsheets

- American Cancer Society (ACS)—Skin Cancer Fact Sheet for Patients and Caregivers  
⇒ <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/cancer-control/en/booklets-flyers/skin-cancer-fact-sheet-patient-version.pdf>
- American Cancer Society (ACS)—Skin Cancer Fact Sheet  
⇒ <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/microsites/circle-of-life/documents/col-skin.pdf>
- Skin Cancer Foundation—Skin Cancer Facts & Statistics  
⇒ <https://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/skin-cancer-facts/>
- Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine—Skin Cancer Facts and Stats  
⇒ <https://geiselmed.dartmouth.edu/students/student-wellness-resources/sun-safety-and-skin-cancer-prevention/skin-cancer-facts-and-stats/>

### Graphics

- American Academy of Dermatology Association (AAD)—Flyers and Posters  
⇒ <https://www.aad.org/public/public-health/flyers-posters>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—Skin Cancer Resources to Share  
⇒ [https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/resources/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/badges.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/resources/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/badges.htm)

### Videos

- American Academy of Dermatology Association (AAD)—Flyers and Posters  
⇒ <https://www.aad.org/public/public-health/flyers-posters>  
◇ *Click on the “Videos” tab on the page*
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—Skin Cancer Resources to Share  
⇒ [https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/resources/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/badges.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/resources/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/badges.htm)
- American Cancer Society—Skin Cancer Videos  
⇒ <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/skin-cancer/skin-cancer-videos.html>
- Inspira Health—Skin Cancer Prevention  
⇒ <https://youtu.be/yvobUj8kks0>

## **Ready-Made Media cont.**

### Social Media

- George Washington Cancer Center—Social Media Toolkit Archive & Melanoma and Skin Cancer Awareness Month Campaign
  - ⇒ <https://cancercontroltap.org/news/social-media-toolkit-archive/>
  - ⇒ <https://cancercontroltap.org/news/melanoma-and-skin-cancer-awareness-month-campaign/>
- Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU)—Social Media Toolkit
  - ⇒ <https://www.ohsu.edu/war-on-melanoma/social-media-toolkit>
- Wisconsin Cancer Collaborative—Social Media Toolkit: Sun Safety
  - ⇒ <https://wicancer.org/resources/social-media-toolkits/social-media-toolkit-sun-safety/>
- Skin Cancer Foundation—Skin Cancer Awareness Toolkit
  - ⇒ <https://www.skincancer.org/get-involved/skin-cancer-awareness-month/toolkit/>

### Additional Resources

- Skin Cancer Foundation—Quiz: How Much Do You Know About Skin Cancer?
  - ⇒ <https://www.skincancer.org/blog/skin-cancer-quiz/>
- Skin Cancer Foundation—Skin Type Quiz: Are You at Risk for Skin Cancer?
  - ⇒ <https://www.skincancer.org/blog/are-you-at-risk-for-skin-cancer/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—Skin Cancer Resources to Share
  - ⇒ [https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/resources/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/badges.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/skin-cancer/resources/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/badges.htm)
- American Academy of Dermatology Association—10 Surprising Facts About Indoor Tanning
  - ⇒ <https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/skin-cancer/surprising-facts-about-indoor-tanning>

Please note that not all cancer screening messages contained in this resource manual are consistent with Maryland Department of Health guidance. If you choose to use information from these web resources, we encourage you to carefully check materials for consistency with the current guidance provided by the Maryland Department of Health.

Please contact Tony Rodriguez at [anthony.rodriguez@maryland.gov](mailto:anthony.rodriguez@maryland.gov) if you have any questions.