

At a glance—Skin cancer

Adapted from About skin cancer at www.sunsmart.com.au/skin-cancer/about-skin-cancer

About skin cancer

What it is

Skin cancer is a disease of the body's skin cells. It is usually caused by the sun's ultraviolet radiation damaging the skin cells. When the skin cells die or are damaged, more skin cells are produced to replace them. Sometimes, this regrowth becomes disordered and cells multiply and form a tumour (or growth). The tumour can continue to grow and destroy healthy cells.

The impact of the sun's rays

Each time the skin is exposed to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun, changes take place in the structure and function of the skin cells. Over time, the skin cells can become permanently damaged. This damage gets worse with each exposure to ultraviolet radiation and increases the risk of skin cancer when new skin cells are produced to replace the damaged ones.

How it spreads

Cancer cells can break off from the tumour and can be carried to other parts of the body by the bloodstream or lymphatic system. These cancer cells can then multiply and form other tumours in other parts of the body, including the brain, liver and lungs.

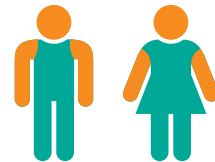
People most at risk

All skin types can be damaged by exposure to ultraviolet radiation. Excessive exposure in the first 20 years of life is very dangerous. While some people such as naturally dark (or olive) skinned people have skin types that are less likely to burn, they are still at risk of developing skin cancer. However, the risk is lower. Dark-skinned people still get skin cancer, but their skin cancers may develop in unusual places, for example under their fingernails or on the soles of their feet.

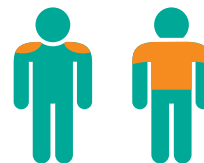
Skin cancer sites

Skin cancers can occur anywhere on the body, but are usually found on those parts of the body that are regularly exposed to the sun:

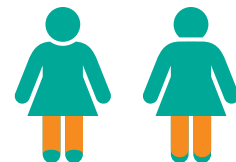
- For both **males and females**, the face and arms are the areas of the body most commonly affected by non-melanoma skin cancer.



- **Males** often develop dangerous melanomas on the back and shoulders.



- **Females** often develop dangerous melanomas on their legs.



Note that melanomas are not confined to these sites. Skin cancers can occur anywhere, but they are rarely found on areas of skin that are always shielded from the sun.

Types of skin cancer

There are three main types of skin cancer:



Melanoma

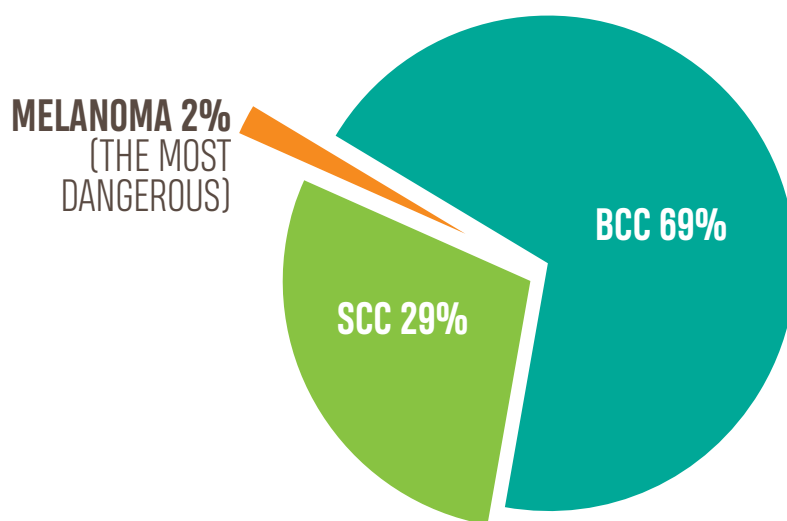
- Most dangerous but least common type of skin cancer.
- If treated early, nearly all melanomas can be cured.
- If left untreated, cancer cells can spread throughout the body.
- Cause most deaths from skin cancer.
- Warning signs include:
 - a new spot or existing spot that changes
 - a mole that grows quickly
 - a mole that changes in colour or shape
 - a skin spot that bleeds easily or itches.

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)

- Non-melanoma skin cancer that is common.
- Can spread to other parts of the body if left untreated.
- Can nearly always be cured.
- Warning signs include:
 - flat scaly patches or sores that won't heal and might bleed easily.

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC)

- Non-melanoma skin cancer.
- Most common form of skin cancer.
- Easily treated in most cases.
- Can be disfiguring if left untreated.
- Warning signs include:
 - a small lump or scaly patch that might
 - have a pearly appearance
 - become ulcerated.



The pie chart shows the approximate percentages of each type of skin cancer found in Australia.