

FACT SHEET – MELANOMA

FAST FACTS

- Melanoma is one of the fastest growing cancers worldwide
- Roughly 5,300 Canadians will be diagnosed with melanoma this year and 920 will die from the diseaseⁱ
- 90% of melanomas are caused by exposure to UV light and sunlight, including tanning bedsⁱⁱ
- Melanoma is one of the few cancers to affect young adults and is the second most common cancer amongst 15-34 year oldsⁱⁱⁱ
- Melanoma is most common on the backs of men and on the legs of women, although it can appear anywhere on the skin
- The survival rate for melanoma is high if it is detected early and unlike many cancers, melanoma is generally clearly visible on the skin

RISK FACTORS

There is no single cause of melanoma, but some factors increase the risk of developing the disease such as exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun or from artificial UV light (such as tanning beds)^{iv}. In addition, factors such as, family history of melanoma in one or more relatives, many atypical moles or a personal history of melanoma increases the chance of getting the disease. People with light skin, light eyes or light or red hair or those that burn easily also have a greater risk of getting melanoma. Some may develop melanoma without any of these risk factors.

MELANOMA STAGING

Melanoma is staged by the size and shape of the mole, and by the spread of the cancer.

Stage 0	Melanoma in situ or an abnormality on the skin
Stages I – II	Early stage, localized disease
Stage III (regional advanced melanoma)	Cancer has spread to local lymph nodes or to the lymph vessels ^v
Stage IV (distant advanced melanoma)	Cancer has spread to distant parts of the body e.g. lungs, liver, brain or bone ^{vi}

} **Advanced Melanoma**

DETECTION AND DIAGNOSIS^{vii}

It is important that melanoma be diagnosed early. Supported by the Melanoma Network of Canada, the ABCDE system is a simple procedure that can be employed in daily life as a simple mnemonic for detecting early signs of melanoma. Moles that are changing or evolving or have one or more of the following characteristics should be examined by a physician^{viii}.

A = Asymmetrical shape

B = Border irregularity

C = Colour variability

D = Diameter greater than six millimetres

E = Evolution of shape, border, colour or size

At present, the only way to accurately diagnose melanoma is via biopsy. This involves removal of all or part of the suspicious mole or growth, and pathological examination under a microscope to see if any melanoma cells are present. If the cells are cancerous, they may be studied further to see how fast they are growing^{ix}.

CURRENT TREATMENT

Melanoma is the most serious type of skin cancer^x. Each person with melanoma will have a treatment plan designed for them by their healthcare team^{xi}. While surgical removal of the tumour is the primary treatment for melanoma, it is less often used in more advanced stages of disease because the cancer cells are no longer localized. Treatment for Stage IV melanoma depends on whether the cancer can be surgically removed or not.

- **Chemotherapy** - May be given as pills or by injection to interfere with the ability of cancer cells to grow and spread, however is not used very often to treat melanoma^{xii}.
- **Immunotherapy** – Also known as Biological therapy, is a treatment that uses a patient's immune system to fight cancer or to help control side effects of other cancer treatments. Natural body substances or drugs made from natural body substances are used to boost the patient's own defences against illness^{xiii}.
- **Radiation Therapy** – Use of high energy particles or waves directed at a tumour to destroy cancer cells^{xiv}. Radiation therapy may be used to help control melanoma that has spread to other parts of the body. It can also help relieve pain or other symptoms^{xv}.

PROGNOSIS/SURVIVAL:

Survival rates for patients with melanoma vary greatly depending on the stage of the disease. 90 per cent of Canadians diagnosed with melanoma will survive, however early detection of melanoma plays a large factor in recovery^{xvi}. For patients being treated for Stage III melanoma, five-year survival rates show great variance, from 13 to 69 per cent, depending on the combination of risk factors. Prognosis for Stage IV melanoma is poor and there are no approved treatments that have impacted this outlook^{xvii}.

More information about melanoma can be found at the Melanoma Network of Canada website:
www.melanomanetwork.ca

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- ⁱⁱ Melanoma Network of Canada. *Fact Summary*. Available at: <http://melanomaneetwork.ca/page.php?page=14> Accessed February 22 2011.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Cancer Care Nova Scotia. *Skin Cancer Statistics*. Available at: http://www.cancercare.ns.ca/site-cc/media/cancercare/Skin_Cancer_Statistics.pdf Accessed February 15 2011.
- ^{iv} Canadian Cancer Society. *Causes of Melanoma*. Available at: http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Types%20of%20cancer/Causes%20of%20melanoma.aspx?sc_lang=en. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^v Balch CM et al. *Final version of 2009 AJCC melanoma staging and classification*. *J Clin Oncol*. 2009 Dec 20;27(36):6199-206. Epub 2009 Nov 16.
- ^{vi} Balch CM et al. *Final version of 2009 AJCC melanoma staging and classification*. *J Clin Oncol*. 2009 Dec 20;27(36):6199-206. Epub 2009 Nov 16
- ^{vii} Melanoma Network of Canada. *Detection and Prevention*. Available at <http://melanomaneetwork.ca/page.php?page=87>. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^{viii} Canadian Cancer Society. *Staging for melanoma*. Available at: <http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Types%20of%20cancer/Staging%20for%20melanoma.aspx>. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^{ix} Canadian Cancer Society. *Diagnosing Melanoma*. Available at: <http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Types%20of%20cancer/Diagnosing%20melanoma.aspx>. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^x Canadian Cancer Society. *Diagnosing Melanoma*. Available at: <http://info.cancer.ca/cce-ecc/default.aspx?Lang=E&toc=46>. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^{xi} Canadian Cancer Society. *Diagnosing Melanoma*. Available at: <http://info.cancer.ca/cce-ecc/default.aspx?Lang=E&toc=46>. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^{xii} Canadian Cancer Society. *Treatment for Melanoma*. Available at: http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Types%20of%20cancer/Treatment%20for%20melanoma.aspx?sc_lang=en#ixzz1EdMiCXQN. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^{xiii} Canadian Cancer Society. *Treatment for Melanoma*. Available at: http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Types%20of%20cancer/Treatment%20for%20melanoma.aspx?sc_lang=en#ixzz1EdMiCXQN. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^{xiv} Canadian Cancer Society. *Treatment for Melanoma*. Available at: http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Types%20of%20cancer/Treatment%20for%20melanoma.aspx?sc_lang=en#ixzz1EdMiCXQN. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^{xv} Canadian Cancer Society. *Treatment for Melanoma*. Available at: http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Types%20of%20cancer/Treatment%20for%20melanoma.aspx?sc_lang=en#ixzz1EdMiCXQN. Accessed on February 21, 2011.
- ^{xvi} Canadian Cancer Statistics 2009.
- ^{xvii} Korn, E. *Meta-analysis of Phase 2 Cooperative Group Trials in Metastatic Stage IV Melanoma to Determine Progression-Free and Overall Survival Benchmarks for Future Phase 2 Trials*. *J Clin Oncol* 288; 26: 526-534