

## Skin Cancer *By Saira George, MD*

The Valley's endless supply of sunny days is one of its best qualities. Excessive sun exposure comes with an important consequence though: an increased risk of skin cancer. As Valley of the Sun residents, we should all be skin cancer-savvy. Here are some key points about skin cancer to know.

Basal cell carcinomas (BCC) make up the majority of skin cancers. Luckily, they are generally slow growing and rarely spread outside of the skin but can be disfiguring if left untreated. Most BCCs arise in sun-exposed areas such as the face, upper trunk, and arms. They often look like a pearly pink bump and may be mistaken for a small pimple or blemish. Unlike a pimple though, a BCC doesn't heal up; it slowly grows larger. BCCs also have a tendency to form sores or bleed with minor trauma.

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) is the second most common skin cancer. Like BCCs, most SCCs occur in chronically

sun exposed areas like the face, arms, or upper trunk. They often start as a pink bump with a rough or scaly surface that grows and may bleed or form sores. While many SCCs grow only in the skin, aggressive forms have the ability to spread beyond the skin and can even be deadly if allowed to grow.

Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. They arise when ultraviolet damage causes mutations in the DNA of melanocytes, the color producing cells found throughout the skin and in moles. Most melanomas are brown or black but occasionally they can be skin colored, pink, red or blue. They often look like an "ugly duckling mole" – one that looks different from the other moles on your body. Features found in many melanomas are an asymmetric shape, scalloped borders, multiple colors, and a diameter greater than 1 cm. One of the most important clues that a mole may be melanoma is

change – a new mole that appears out of nowhere and grows or an old mole that is changing in shape, color, or size should be a red flag. Melanomas can occur anywhere on the skin but they often arise in relatively covered areas such as the back and the legs. These sites are often hardest hit by the intense, intermittent ultraviolet damage that results in sunburns and is thought to be a major risk factor for melanoma.

### The good news...

Unlike other cancers that grow inside the body, skin cancers arise where they can be detected and treated early. Learn more about skin cancer prevention, detection, and treatment at [www.skincancer.org](http://www.skincancer.org) and remember to a) incorporate a yearly full-body skin cancer check with your provider, and b) have any suspicious skin growth examined as soon as possible.

### Skin Cancer Prevention Tips

- Seek shade when the sun's rays are the most direct between 10 am - 4 pm
- Apply sunscreen (30 SPF or above) 15 minutes before heading outdoors
- Wear protective clothing including a hat when possible
- Avoid sunburns/suntans whether it's outside or in a tanning bed



**Thunderbird Internal Medicine – Glendale**  
5620 W. Thunderbird Rd #C-1, #F-1 & #G-2  
Glendale, Arizona 85306

**Thunderbird Internal Medicine - Estrella**  
9150 W. Indian School Rd #118  
Phoenix, Arizona 85037