



## Canadian Dermatology Association 2011 Melanoma Fact Sheet

- Melanoma is a less common but most serious form of skin cancer since it can spread in the body.
- Melanoma is now the 8<sup>th</sup> most frequent cancer in Canada, affecting 5,500 people in 2011 and causing 950 deaths.<sup>1</sup>
- The survival rate for melanoma is high; 90% of Canadians diagnosed with melanoma will survive. Early detection of melanoma is very important as this is directly linked to the high survival rate.<sup>2</sup> Unlike many cancers, melanoma is *clearly visible on the skin*.
- Melanoma is most common on the backs of men and on the legs of women, although it can appear anywhere on the skin.
- Up to 70% of all melanomas are first identified by the patient themselves (53%) or close family members (17%).<sup>3</sup>
- The lifetime risk of melanoma for Canadian men is now 1 in 74. For women, it is 1 in 90.<sup>2</sup> In comparison, the lifetime risk of melanoma for Americans in the 1930's was 1 in 1,500.
- Excessive ultraviolet (UV) exposure from the sun and sunbeds plays a leading role in the development of melanoma and is the *most preventable cause* of this disease.
- Melanoma is one of a handful of cancers where the incidence in Canadians continues to increase (1.4% a year in men, 1.4% a year in women). This is likely related to more leisure time spent in the sun without adequate protection.<sup>1</sup>
- Looking at all cancers found in the **15 to 29 age group**, melanoma was the 3<sup>rd</sup> most common cancer in young women and represented 11% of new cases. There is growing evidence that exposure to ultraviolet radiation through the use of tanning beds and sunlamps, increases the risk of developing melanoma especially if exposure begins in adolescence or young adulthood.<sup>2</sup>
- Risk factors for melanoma include: fair skin that burns and is unable to tan; freckles; red or blond hair; many moles; moles which are large or unusual in colour or shape; close family history of melanoma; excessive UV exposure from the sun and/or sunbeds; a history of severe sunburns.

- The death rate for men with melanoma continues to rise (0.5% a year).<sup>2</sup> Studies show older, fair skinned men are more likely to die to melanoma than any other group. This may be due to the frequent location of melanoma on the back in this group, an area which is difficult to see.
- Ways to protect yourself include finding out your personal risk, checking your skin and knowing the early warning signs of melanoma, the ABCDEs.

**For more information:** Sue Sherlock, communications officer, Sun Awareness Program for skin cancer photos for media use, 604-985-9184 or [ssherlock@dermatology.ca](mailto:ssherlock@dermatology.ca)

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Cancer Statistics 2011

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Cancer Statistics 2009

<sup>3</sup> Koh HK, Miller DR, Geller AC, Clapp RW, Mercer MB, Lew RA. Who discovers melanoma? *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 1992: 26 : 914-919