

# Moles and melanoma in children and teens

## WHAT ARE MOLES?

"Moles" (melanocytic nevi) are common, raised or flat spots on the skin. Moles are most often tan or brown in color but can sometimes be skin-colored, pink, or even blue.

Some children are born with moles. A mole that is present at birth is called a congenital nevus.

Other moles may appear over time. It is normal for children to grow new moles as they get older. Teenagers often have 15-25 moles. Children may get more moles if other family members have many moles. Spending lots of time in the sun can also trigger more moles.

## WHAT IS A MELANOMA?

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer. Melanoma is very rare in children. Melanoma is more common in adults.

### RISK FACTORS FOR MELANOMA INCLUDE:

- » Having lots of moles (more than 50)
- » Sunburns
- » Tanning bed use
- » Family history

Preventing sun damage in childhood can help prevent melanoma later in life.

## HERE ARE SOME HELPFUL TIPS THAT CAN HELP TO WATCH FOR MELANOMA:

- 1 A mole that looks different than other moles on the body should be checked by a dermatologist.
- 2 In children, a melanoma can look like a growing pink or red bump that may or may not bleed.
- 3 Moles with any of the following "ABCDE changes" should be checked by your doctor.

## How can I tell the difference between a mole and a melanoma?

### MOLE

- » Round shape
- » All one color
- » Smooth edges
- » Stable in size, or growing slowly with a child

### MELANOMA

- » Irregular shape
- » More than one color
- » More likely to bleed
- » Growing quickly

A new pink or black spot, a quickly growing spot, a spot that looks different than the other moles on the body, or a mole that has recently changed should be checked by a dermatologist.

## ABCDE CHANGES OF MELANOMA

- » **ASYMMETRY:** If you draw a line through the middle of a healthy mole, the two sides should match. Moles with asymmetry are more likely to have melanoma.
- » **BORDER:** The border of a melanoma tends to be uneven and hard to see.
- » **COLOR:** Moles should be one color. Melanoma is more likely to have more than one color.
- » **DIAMETER:** Most healthy moles are small, smaller than a pencil eraser. A spot that is larger than this should be checked.
- » **EVOLUTION:** Evolution means change. Changes in size, shape, color, or thickness can be a sign of melanoma.

Not all moles that have ABCDE changes will be melanoma, but moles with any of these changes should be examined.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY CHILD'S SKIN AND PREVENT MELANOMA?

### 1. SUN PROTECTION

The most important thing you can do to prevent skin cancer of all kinds is to protect from the sun. The best ways to protect from the sun are:

- Avoid sun from 10 AM to 2 PM when the sun is strongest.
- Wear protective clothing (e.g., long sleeves, long pants, wide-brimmed hats, and sunglasses).
- Wear sunscreen that is:
  - » Broad spectrum (UVA and UVB coverage)
  - » SPF30 or higher
  - » Water resistant

For more information about sun protection, please see the Society for Pediatric Dermatology's Sun Protection handout:

<https://pedsderm.net/for-patients-families/patient-handouts/#SunProtection>

### 2. KEEP AN EYE ON MOLES FOR CHANGES.

It can be hard to memorize the way each mole looks. If you look at moles once a month, you may more easily notice changes.

- When checking your skin, make sure to look at your palms and soles and in between fingers and toes.
- Taking pictures to compare can also be helpful.



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