

Skin Cancer
101: A primer
on what it is
and what it
might look like

By Roberta Baker
Union Leader Staff

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Between 1982 and 2017, the rates of melanoma — which can be deadly when it spreads — doubled in the U.S.

All types of skin cancer are increasing as people are living longer, and more are diagnosed at younger and older ages, the American Cancer Society reports.

Women have higher rates of skin cancer detection. Men have higher rates of skin cancer deaths.

The most preventable and universal cause: Overexposure to cell-damaging UVA and UVB rays that come from the sun, sunlamps and tanning beds.

Ultraviolet radiation is active even on overcast days. The irreversible harm it causes compounds over time, leading to skin texture changes, premature skin aging and the uncontrolled growth of malignant cells.

Skin cancer develops primarily in three types of skin cells: basal cells, squamous cells and melanocytes, which generate more pigment when they're exposed to sun and are responsible for our skin color.

Basal cell carcinoma, which occurs in cells beneath the skin's top layer, accounts for roughly 80% of all skin cancers, and is most frequently found on sun-exposed skin such as the face, ears, scalp, neck, shoulders, back and legs.

It can show up as a persistent sore that won't heal (in four weeks), and may be shiny, pink, red or white, tender, rough, bleeding or crusting.

Surveys of medical expenditures estimate that about 6.1 million adults in the U.S. are treated for basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas each year, at a cost of roughly \$8.9 billion.

Squamous cell carcinoma, the second-most common skin cancer, with over a million new cases diagnosed in the U.S. each year, occurs in the thin, flat cells that make up the skin we see. Over 1 million new cases are diagnosed nationwide each year.

It's found on any skin that receives recurrent sun exposure, but can also form in scars and injured skin. It may look thick, scaly and red, wart-like, bump-like or resemble like a small sore or wound that heals then repeatedly breaks open.

It grows more rapidly than basal cell cancer, can spread to other parts of the body, but can be treated and eliminated when caught early.

Melanoma, which begins in melanocytes, the cells below the squamous and basal layers, is the deadliest form of skin cancer, accounting for roughly 1% of all skin cancers.

It can easily replicate and spread to other types of cells and sites in the body, including in the liver and brain. In 2022, 97,059 new cases of melanoma were diagnosed in the U.S., and it's the most common cancer in people age 15 to 29, according to the CDC.

Dermatologists tell us how to initially screen for suspicious moles, but amateur eyes aren't foolproof: Do the sides look different from each other? Are the edges irregular or indistinct? Does it have different colors in different places? Is it larger than a typical pencil eraser (about 6 millimeters)? Does

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No Flavors
this week

The monthly NHMedical section takes the place of this week's Flavors section. Flavors, with Our Gourmet, returns next week.

Under the Sun

NH faces surge in UV-related illness

By Roberta Baker
Union Leader Staff

At pools, parks and beaches, vending machines dispense candy and soft drinks. Trucks peddle ice cream. Snack bars sell burgers, hot dogs and fries. But you probably don't see a machine that provides an ounce of sunscreen.

If Deb Girard, executive director of Impact Melanoma, is successful in her fight against the deadliest form of skin cancer, parks, beaches, pools, playgrounds, marinas, golf courses, workplaces, schools, athletic fields and trailheads will have sunscreen dispensers to protect people from irreversible, cumulative damage caused by the sun's ultraviolet rays — especially small children, teens and young adults.

"Roughly 90% of skin cancers are caused by sun-related behavior," said Girard.

Across the United States, there are more cases of basal and squamous cell skin cancer than all other forms of cancer combined, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. New Hampshire ranks close behind Utah, Vermont and Hawaii — states with the highest skin cancer rates, and the Granite State is seventh from the top for melanoma, which can be fatal if it isn't caught early. New Hampshire's melanoma rate is 39% higher than the national average.

In the Granite State, where the snow doesn't melt until April or sometimes May, the incidence of skin cancer is climbing.

Multiple reasons have been suggested by skin cancer experts. New Hampshire has a high percentage of fair-skinned people, including those with Irish or Celtic backgrounds, the ethnic groups most susceptible to skin cancer. Summers are shorter here than in southern states and Granite Staters have a false sense of security when it comes to spending time outdoors, including in winter and on cloudy days, when ultraviolet rays are still active and strong.

Most of us don't use sunscreen when we need to or reapply it as often as we should, dermatologists report. False information swirls online among teens and appearance-conscious adults. Skin doctors blame a universal culture, promoted by media and thriving on the internet, that portrays tanned skin as the beauty ideal, not as skin that has had too much sun and is accumulating damage to cellular DNA, which starts when we're young and continues as we age, eventually leading to skin cancer.

The data is startling. One in five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime, and some will develop many skin cancers, said Dr. Mollie MacCormack, a dermatologist at Southern New Hampshire Medical Center in Nashua, quoting national research predictions.

"The lighter your skin color and the more time you have spent in the sun, the greater your risk of developing skin cancer," she

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METRO

Many Granite Staters don't use sunscreen or reapply nearly as much as they should, dermatologists report.



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Dr. James Dinulos examining and operating on a patient.

Dermatologists urge smarter sun habits in NH

By Roberta Baker
Union Leader Staff

Throughout history, human beings have worshipped the sun with fear, reverence and either a desire to avoid it, or bask in it — provided it's not too hot, and sometimes even when it is.

Considering America's zeal for tanning, or at least having a tanned appearance, many of us pay little attention to reducing the risks of sun exposure, and preparing before we spend hours outdoors.

According to a survey by the American Academy of Dermatology in 2022, 76% of Americans agree that sun protection is a healthy and important habit, but only 41% regularly protect themselves, and 28% say they rarely or never use protections including sunscreen, protective clothing or umbrellas.

A 2024 survey found that 1 in 5 adults weren't aware that they could get sunburned in



PROVIDED BY SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE MEDICAL CENTER

Dr. Mollie MacCormack, a dermatologist at Southern New Hampshire Medical Center in Nashua, examines spots on a patient's skin.

winter and even fewer protected themselves from UV radiation in cold weather.

Skin cancer risk has increased dramatically in the U.S. over the last 50 years, said Dr. Mollie MacCormack, a dermatologist at Southern New

Hampshire Medical Center in Nashua, and it continues to rise in New Hampshire.

One in 5 Americans may develop a basal cell carcinoma — the most common skin cancer — in their lifetime, said Dr. Matthew LeBoeuf, an

associate professor of dermatology at Dartmouth College's Geisel School of Medicine and director of Mohs Micrographic Surgery at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center. The Mohs surgical method removes skin tumors while testing for cancer in the margins and in successive layers of skin.

Over time, it's become clearer: Americans underestimate skin cancer risk and have entrenched misunderstandings when it comes to skin safety.

"We live in a very rural state. A lot of men have worked outside their whole lives and only go the doctor when they're sick or when their wives tell them to," said Dr. James Dinulos, a dermatologist at Seacoast Dermatology in Portsmouth and a Mohs surgeon. He said some men have come in with a skin problem they assumed was nothing and remarked, "It's been bleeding for 6 months."

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Q&A

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Dinulos, in 25 years of practicing in New Hampshire, said he’s seen the incidence of melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers increase.

“It’s a tremendous burden and cost to our society, and it’s basically caused by UV radiation,” he said.

In the age of abundant online medical information that may be accurate or misleading, here are some questions answered by New Hampshire dermatologists.

Riding in my car or truck, is my skin safe?

Many people believe they’re protected from ultraviolet rays while driving, unless their window is down and they see their arm getting burned. Most skin cancer is caused by sun exposure, wherever that may be, said MacCormack at SNHMC.

Shorter-wavelength UVB radiation, the rays typically associated with tanning and burning, is blocked by most window glass. UVA radiation has a longer wavelength and can penetrate glass. It’s associated with premature skin aging and increased skin cancer risk. The effects may not be seen for decades.

When it comes to cars and trucks, front windshields are typically laminated glass, with protection against UVA and UVB radiation. Side windows, however, are made of tempered glass, and UVA rays travel through it.

The solution? “For a very reasonable cost, clear films that block almost all UV rays can be applied to car windows after purchase,” MacCormack said by email.

It’s a cloudy day. It isn’t even warm. Do I really need to apply sunscreen?

In New Hampshire and other northern states,



Young skin is especially vulnerable, but regular sunscreen use can make a big difference.

people have a false sense of security when it comes to sun damage on overcast days. Up to 80% of ultraviolet rays can travel through haze or lighter clouds, MacCormack said. UV radiation may decline on cloudy days, but you can still get sunburned.

It’s important to use sunscreen on any exposed skin regardless of the cloud cover, if you’re spending time outdoors, she said.

Pay attention to the UV index, which is included in most weather reports. The higher the index, the more protection is warranted. When it’s over 3, rub on the sunscreen.

UV rays can reflect off water, sand and snow, and the intensity rises with elevation. Use sunscreen

when you’re hiking, running, climbing, skiing, boating and swimming.

Remember to reapply it when you get out of the water.

How can I get a ‘healthy tan’?

Sorry, there’s no such thing.

Some skin tones are better able to tan and more resistant to burning, but damage by UV rays affects everyone, regardless of skin color, and the damage increases with years of sunbathing.

Skin cancer is caused by UV radiation whether it comes from the sun, indoor UV lamps or tanning beds.

Dermatologists say sunscreen should become a habit, modeled by parents,

grandparents and siblings, and practiced throughout life.

I’m older and have seen it all. Do I need to worry about skin cancer?

Baby boomers, the post-World War II generation, are often ignorant about skin cancer. “It was often thought to harden your skin by going out and getting a ‘first burn.’ It’s how they were raised,” said Dioulos at Seacoast Dermatology. Now, “as they age, we’re really starting to see it.”

Annual full-body scans are important as you get older, especially if you’ve had any type of skin cancer, are over 65, or have a medical condition of fair skin that puts you at greater risk.

Skin scans check about 36 areas, including behind the ears and between the toes.

Lymphoma, breast and prostate cancer increase your vulnerability and the importance of yearly skin checks.

If I use 100 SPF sunscreen, it’s good all day, right?

Wrong. 100 SPF sunscreens are only marginally more protective than 30 SPF sunscreens, about 97% effective compared with roughly 93% for 30 SPF, Dinulos said.

Best practice is to apply sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before you go outside, MacCormack said.

Some sunscreen ingredients gradually break down with sun exposure,

she said. Sunscreen of any SPF should be reapplied roughly every two or so hours, and whenever you get out of the water or are sweating.

“Dermatologists recommend that you should trust your sunscreen (30 SPF is considered sufficient by most dermatologists), but it should be used on areas exposed to the sun in conjunction with clothing. I think golfers should wear broad-brimmed hats and two gloves instead of one. A visor essentially does nothing. Women need to wear hats,” Dinulos said. “That needs to be a culture change. Pre-cancers on their scalp are hard to treat. We can’t freeze them off” and cancer can extend down hair follicles.

Furthermore, there’s there’s no such thing as waterproof sunscreen, only water-resistant sunscreen, which is tested to tolerate 80 minutes of water exposure, MacCormack said.

“Most people do not apply the recommended amount which is about 1 ounce (roughly a shot glass) to cover the body,” she added. The best way to tell if you’re using the correct SPF product — and enough of it — is to check if you’re getting a tan. “If you’re staying true to your natural skin color, your application is adequate. If not, you need to increase the amount, the frequency or the SPF”

Higher SPF is useful during longer exposure, during reflected exposure and at higher elevations.

What’s a mineral sunscreen?

There are two basic types of sunscreen — physical and chemical, and some products combine them. Zinc oxide and titanium

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Q&A

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dioxide — the mineral sunscreens — provide a physical barrier against the sun. Products based on titanium alone don’t give full-spectrum protection. Opaque zinc oxide paste provides the most effective physical barrier, MacCormack said.

Chemical agents such as avobenzone, octinoxate, octocrylene and oxybenzone protect against sun damage by absorbing UVA and UVB rays and make your skin feel warm when it’s in the sun.

Recent data indicates that both physical and chemical sunscreen ingredients absorb UV radiation and convert it to heat or another form of energy, MacCormack said.

How do I protect my baby and young child?

“If you’re a parent with a baby under a year old, they should not be getting sun at all. They should be in a carriage covered up,” Dinulos said. “DNA is so vulnerable at that age. You’ll see babies carried in backpacks who are frying back there. That’s the worst for when they get older. You don’t know what happened to them from infancy through age 4.”

“We work hard to get people to understand that protection goes a long way,” said Deb Girard, who heads Impact Melanoma, an anti-skin cancer nonprofit in Massachusetts. “It starts at birth. For the first six months of a baby’s life, they should not be out in the sun.” Sun exposure is not a one-and-done assault, she added. Skin damage from UV radiation is cumulative as children grow, and it continues when they’re adults.

Dermatologists and skin safety advocates say infants less than 6 months old should not use sunscreen. They should be kept out

of the sun, period, and dressed in protective clothing. Sun exposure can also cause dehydration.

For kids older than 6 months, MacCormack recommends products with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide because they’re less likely to irritate the skin.

For older infants, toddlers and young children, LeBoeuf at Dartmouth recommends sun-protective clothing such as rash guards and regular application of sunscreen. Hats are a must, and best with brims and flaps. Deck and patio awnings, shaded strollers and beach umbrellas give invaluable protection.

“Consider sun breaks and umbrellas,” LeBoeuf said. “We as adults need to model good sun-protective behavior for our kids.”

Don’t forget to use baby gloves or rub zinc or titanium-based sunscreen on little hands, Dinulos added.

And be mindful of exposure at playgrounds.

“At most places, there’s no ability to get shade because there’s so much concrete,” said Girard at Impact Melanoma, who urges states to adopt laws that will allow children to bring non-prescription sunscreen to school and apply it themselves.

What’s the best way to have healthy, cancer-free skin for my entire life?

According to dermatologists: Get regular skin checkups. Don’t be a sunbather, be a sunscreener — especially if you work or play sports outdoors.

Cover up and seek shade when you can. Check the current UV index in daily weather reports.

At 3 or higher, even on cloudy days, sunscreen or sun protection is needed. A sky packed with clouds can sometimes scatter the

UV rays, intensifying your exposure.

Get annual skin checks by a dermatologist, starting around age 13 and religiously during your 50s and 60s.

“Come in starting when you’re a teenager,” Dinulos said. “At a minimum we’ll remind you of skin cancer and skin aging, and the effects of skin cancers on skin aging and overall health and wellbeing.”

Should I avoid spending lots of time outside?

Fresh air and sunshine have benefits — including for mental health.

But when you’re riding your bike, mowing your lawn, weeding your garden, playing golf, sailing or riding in a boat, or sitting outside with your phone or a book, cover up and wear a broad brimmed hat, ideally with flaps that can cover your neck and ears. Sporting goods stores sell shirts and pants that breathe and block UVA and UVB rays.

Reapply sunscreen every couple of hours, sooner if you’re sweating. Bring sunscreen and a hat when you go to outdoor events.

“Clothes have an SPF of about 1000,” Dinulos said. “But you’re not covering up everything. You should still wear sunscreen on your nose and face. Bottom line is you should put sunscreen on areas that are exposed.”

UV radiation is strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., so plan your activities accordingly.

Consider shifting gears when it comes to your personal appearance.

“It is best to aim to be your natural skin color all year round,” said McCormack at SNHMC. “This can be done while still being outside, being active and doing all the things that make life great.”

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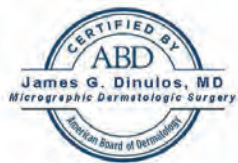
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Surge

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said.

In darker skin, cancer is less rampant, but all skin types are vulnerable, she said.

In Australia, half of people will develop skin cancer in their lifetime, according to studies there. Children's sports are played at night and umbrellas and shaded spaces shield people from the sun's rays. Sun-savvy cultures, including in Japan and Korea, view pale skin as healthy and attractive. Burning and tanning is frowned upon.

"Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a 'healthy tan,'" MacCormack said. "While a tan is better than a sunburn, a tan is your body's reaction to UV exposure. For this reason, it's best to aim to be your natural skin color all year round."

Cultural attitudes are slow to change

Baby boomers grew up with advertisements for Bain de Soleil, Coppertone and St. Tropez tans and scant information on skin cancer. In America, many parents and grandparents sit outside without adequate protection for themselves or their little family members. Many in the post-World War II generation didn't acquire a healthy fear of sun's radiation, or the habit of putting on sunblock. Fresh air and sunshine are extolled as healthy, and they are — as long as you protect your skin.

Dr. James Dinulos at Seacoast Dermatology in Portsmouth worries about young people who are steered by social media. He sees lack of sun protection, whether through hats, clothes or sunscreen, as a time bomb that goes off later in life — invisible now, cancer later.

"Anecdotally, I do see that this generation,

teenage to 25, the TikTok generation, really do listen to influencers," Dinulos said. "If the Kardashians go on and are tan, all the kids on TikTok want to be tan. There's a new TikToker that says sunscreen is bad, and a lot of the kids are not wearing sunscreen. Right now, it's instantaneous on TikTok and it's hard to counteract."

A contest for the best sunburn line has been circulating on social media, Girard added.

"Tanning is starting to be in vogue again. Teens and kids see things in the media. Crazy TikTok competitions. They look at it like cigarette smoking," said Girard, who hopes to get a law passed in New Hampshire that has been adopted in 29 other states. The bill, called "Sunucate," enables kids to bring sunscreen from home and apply it at school. Right now, many public schools require a doctor's prescription for sunscreen, and it's applied in the nurse's office. Girard said she's been working for seven years to get Sunucate passed in Massachusetts.

"If kids are going to be outside, everybody needs to reapply (sunscreen) every couple of hours," she said. Outdoor activities, whether recess or sports, are prime times for damaging exposure.

Sun protection counts

Dinulos, who regularly swims outside, wears a cap, goggles, and a UVA-UVB shielding shirt and pants to protect his body in the water, which reflects the sun's rays. It's not a wet suit, but it is a lightweight barrier. He recommends wearing swim shirts, rash guards, solar sleeves and swim pants — fabrics with SPF ratings like sunscreen, for use at pools, lakes and the ocean. Broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30 is suf-



PROVIDED BY SEACOAST DERMATOLOGY

Dr. James Dinulos, a Mohs micrographic surgeon and dermatologist at Seacoast Dermatology in Portsmouth, checks slides of tumors and surrounding skin under a microscope to make sure that cancer is removed.

ficient, according to the American Academy of Dermatology) should be applied every two hours, more frequently if you're sweating and after you come out of the water, he said.

There's a reluctance among young people who don't understand how skin cancer develops and believe it isn't a problem for them. In America, tanning has social cachet.

"People have better

self-esteem when they have a tan," Girard said. "We see those message on TV." Some people use spray tan to avoid UV radiation, "but there's still the image of 'I need a tan to look good.'"

Studies show that women worry more about skin damage than men. And men generally aren't accustomed to applying skin cream. Some, as they get older, believe they're past the age of skin cancer vulnerability.

"I'm older, the damage has already been done," Dinulos said some guys told him. "You can still have damage. Protective factors aren't as robust as when they were young."

Dr. Matthew LeBoeuf, an associate professor of dermatology and Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center's director of Mohs micrographic surgery (which removes skin cancer and tests surrounding skin for cancerous cells), stated by

email that some patients believe, "If I stay out of the sun in my older years I won't get any skin cancers."

Much of the damage that results in skin cancer was likely caused when they were younger, between ages 5 and 25, LeBoeuf said.

"Even if we start practicing perfect sun protection as we get older, we should still be vigilant to new bumps and spots" that might be cancer, he said. Annual skin checkups are invaluable.

"I hear a lot, 'I don't get burned, I just get a tan,'" LeBoeuf said. "It's important to realize that the sun's rays that hit the skin to result in the tan also cause the oxidative stress that can result in DNA mutations that lead to future skins cancers."

It's not only the sun

Indoor tanning beds expose users to the same ultraviolet radiation that produces a tan outdoors.

In 2016, New Hampshire law restricted tanning bed use to people age 18 and older. But adult fans, including young adults, often use indoor tanning then continue sunbathing outdoors. More skin cancers and melanoma are being spotted in teens and young adults in their 20s, said Girard, of Impact Melanoma.

She urges adults to model sun-safe behavior.

"The incidence of skin cancer in children is small," she said. "It's what happens 10 to 15 years from now."

The health care industry spends about \$8 billion annually taking care of skin cancer in the U.S.

"The biggest thing is the majority of all this is avoidable. You can avoid skin cancer with protection and early skin checks," Girard said. Skin cancer is "really the only cancer that you can see."

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Doctors warn against anti-sunscreen trend

By Sabrina Malhi
The Washington Post

In one TikTok video, a woman declared that she stopped using sunscreen altogether. In an Instagram reel, a man insists that building sun exposure without sunscreen can help boost a person's immunity. And on YouTube, some are promoting do-it-yourself sunscreen alternatives using oil, butters or other natural remedies. For years dermatologists and health experts have extolled the value of sunscreen to prevent skin cancer and protect people from the ultraviolet radiation of the sun. But a growing anti-sunscreen movement has taken hold on social media, causing confusion about its benefits and alarming public health experts who say avoiding sunscreen increases long-term health risks.

How does sunscreen work, and what's in it?

Sunscreen protects the skin by either absorbing or reflecting ultraviolet rays that can cause sunburn, premature aging and skin cancer. Most sunscreen formulas fall into two categories: chemical and mineral. Chemical sunscreens form a thin protective film to absorb UV radiation. They use ingredients such as avobenzone, oxybenzone and octocrylene to absorb UV radiation and convert it into heat before it reaches the skin. Mineral sunscreens rely on zinc oxide or titanium dioxide to physically block UV rays from reaching the skin.

Why is there skepticism of sunscreen?

More Americans are questioning the safety of everyday products, driven



Sunscreen helps shield the skin from ultraviolet rays that can cause sunburn, premature aging and skin cancer.

by a growing distrust in conventional health advice, pharmaceutical companies and federal regulators. Among them are supporters of Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s Make America Healthy Again movement, who have helped revive skepticism of sunscreen ingredients such as oxybenzone and titanium dioxide. Some people are also looking for natural alternatives, and they say skin irritation they have experienced from certain products has caused them to shift from conventional products. As a result, alternatives like homemade creams and mineral-based sunscreens have become more popular. Some people are also choosing to stop using sunscreen entirely. "I am definitely a MAHA mom and voted for Trump so that RFK Jr. could get into office," said Summer

Whiteside, 31, an ER nurse from Wildomar, California, in a text message. "After listening to his podcast on Joe Rogan, I knew he was the man for the job." On Instagram, Whiteside, who doesn't shy away from the label "crunchy," posts about things like beef tallow for sunburns and her preference for mineral sunscreen. Whiteside, who said she has concerns about the chemicals in sunscreen, uses long-sleeved rash guards on her kids and sunblock only on their faces. Some wellness figures have claimed that diet changes or building sun exposure gradually can protect against burns, which dermatologists and the scientific community strongly recommend against. Some in the anti-sunscreen movement point to studies suggesting that certain chemicals cause

cancer or are absorbed too heavily into the body. But public health experts say there are no human studies that conclusively prove ingredients like oxybenzone act as carcinogens. "Oxybenzone has been used since the 1970s in sunscreen, so we would have found out by now if it caused harm," said Henry W. Lim, senior vice president of academic affairs and former chair of dermatology at Henry Ford Health. Lim said that some groups will use testing methods and safety thresholds in studies that differ from those required for product approval in the United States. "A lot of the concerns come from animal studies using high doses, but those results don't automatically translate to humans," said Lim, who is also the president of the International League of Dermato-

logical Societies and a past president of the American Academy of Dermatology. **What do health experts and science say?** Health professionals warn that anti-sunscreen messaging can be harmful for the public because skin cancer remains one of the most common types of cancer, according to the American Cancer Society. Experts say sunscreen is one of the most effective tools for prevention. Adam Friedman, a professor and chair of dermatology at George Washington University, said skepticism of sunscreen is nothing new. Concerns about chemical ingredients and mistrust in federal oversight resurface every few years, often fueled by social media and wellness trends. But he said the science has remained consistent. "Ultraviolet radiation is

a known carcinogen; there is no debate about that," Friedman said. "We've had decades of data showing that sunscreen plays a critical role in reducing skin cancer risk." Studies have shown that regular sunscreen use significantly reduces the risk of skin cancer. A randomized controlled trial in Australia known as the Nambour Skin Cancer Prevention Trial followed more than 1,600 participants for about 10 years. Those who used sunscreen daily had a lower incidence of melanoma compared with those who used it occasionally. Another prospective cohort study of more than 143,000 Norwegian women found that using an SPF 15 or higher sunscreen was associated with a 33 percent lower risk of melanoma compared with people using less than an SPF 15 or none at all. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher daily, even on cloudy days. Mineral sunscreens containing zinc oxide or titanium dioxide are considered safe by dermatologists. Veena Vanchinathan, a board-certified dermatologist in California and a member of the American Academy of Dermatology, said the hesitation regarding sunscreen use in wellness spaces is not supported by current scientific evidence. She explained that just because a sunscreen ingredient is absorbed into the body doesn't mean it is harmful. "We see small amounts of absorption from many everyday products without any proven risk," Vanchinathan said. "Our skin is designed to function as a barrier, not a sponge."





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Skin Cancer 101

From Page B1

it change over time in size, shape or color? Do its symptoms switch? For example, itching, bleeding or just being tender to touch?

Dermatologists say normal moles look pretty similar, but melanomas almost always stand out. Look for any skin spot that doesn't match the surrounding skin. Is the mole or dark spot new, odd, larger, smaller or darker than the others?

Get your skin checked by a dermatologist

Melanoma killed Bob Marley at age 36. Jimmy Buffett was 76 when he died of Merkel cell carcinoma, a less common skin cancer.

Regular skin checks are important. Dermatologists say to pay especially close attention if you have characteristics that put you at risk for skin cancer, such as fair skin that burns easily, green or blue eyes, blonde or red hair, a history of childhood sunburns, a family history of skin cancer, and a personal history of tanning indoors.

People over age 50 and those with weakened immune systems are more vulnerable, along with people with a history of smoking or who currently smoke.

"Things that bleed, things that look like pimples and don't go away and get larger. A jet-black mark. Anything on your body that's still growing after two weeks, you need to come in," said Dr. James Dinulos, a Mohs micrographic skin cancer surgeon and dermatologist at Seacoast Dermatology in Portsmouth. "By definition, skin cancer



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Some dangerous spots can look harmless, which is why regular skin checks by a dermatologist are important.

has to have unrestrained growth."

Many skin cancers, especially in the initial stages, are tough for amateurs to distinguish from otherwise harmless marks, lumps and moles.

"It's hard to educate people to evaluate a normal mole," Dinulos said. Most primary care physicians refer patients to dermatolo-

gists when their skin spots or growths look unusual or increasing in size. It's important to track their appearance over time.

"In some of the most dangerous, the only thing they show is growth. The most important thing is to be aware of your body, new spots, and anything changing and growing," Dinulos said.

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