

SAFETY

Skin cancer threatens agricultural workers

by Ugochukwu Uzoeghelu



Skin cancer is an abnormal, uncontrolled growth of skin cells. It occurs when mutations occur in healthy skin cells, most often due to ultraviolet (UV)

radiation exposure. It can appear as moles, raised bumps, scaly patches or open sores, and, though not always, most often develops on skin exposed to the sun.

There are three basic types of skin cancer: basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma. Basal and squamous cell are typically easy to treat. However, malignant melanoma is more dangerous and involves a more difficult treatment regimen. Most skin cancers can be successfully treated if caught early, so look for areas of skin (lesions) that fail to heal completely within approximately 30 days.

According to the Harvard School of Medicine, melanoma is the fifth most common type of new cancer diagnosis in men and the seventh most common type in women, and rates are steadily increasing. Although risk increases with age, melanoma is now frequently seen in young people. The National Cancer Institute estimates that one in five Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime.

Survival rates are much higher when skin cancer is detected and treated early, stressing the importance of self-exams and periodic total body exams by a dermatologist.

Skin cancer can affect anyone. However, the following factors may increase a person's risk of developing the disease:

- Excessive sun exposure.
- Fair skin, light-colored eyes, and blond or red hair.
- Numerous freckles.
- History of sunburns.
- Weakened immune system.
- Family or personal history of skin cancer.

The most deadly form of skin cancer is malignant melanoma. Remembering the signs of malignant melanoma is as easy as A, B, C, D, E.

Asymmetry: The sides of the lesion don't match.

Borders: The borders are irregular and jagged.

Color: The colors can include pink, brown, red and black, and are mottled in appearance, not uniform.

Diameter: Anything larger than 6 millimeters (about the size of a pencil eraser) is suspicious.

Elevation: A skin lesion that is elevated, in combination with any other skin cancer sign, is suspicious.

The most common cause of skin



The signs of malignant melanoma include elevated lesions that have non-matching sides, irregular and jagged borders, mottled appearance and are larger than 6 millimeters.

cancer is overexposure to UV rays, either from the sun or tanning beds. Be smart this summer; cover up and observe the following guidelines:

- **Be shady:** Wear a wide-brimmed hat. The brim should be at least 4 inches wide. Baseball caps do not protect your ears, nose or neck. Protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses.
- **Lather up:** Wear sunscreen, even on cloudy days.
- **Cover up:** Light-colored, lightweight, long-sleeved shirts and long pants will keep your body cool and protect your skin. ▶

MANAGEMENT

Check yourself regularly for any of the signs mentioned above. Use a mirror to check your back, or have someone else check it for you. If you notice any warning signs of skin cancer, make an appointment to see your family doctor or dermatologist right away.

Early detection and treatment of skin cancers provide a 95 percent success rate. The success rate falls dramatically once the cancer begins to spread.

Agricultural, forestry and fishing workers are all at higher risk for skin cancer due to working long hours

outdoors. With the pressures of haying, harvesting and working with livestock, many ranchers and farmers don't place much, if any, importance on preventing skin cancer. But remember, skin cancer is preventable; it can be fatal; and you are at risk. ■