

# SKIN CANCER

## PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
**Harford County**  
Health Department

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### WHAT IS SKIN CANCER <sup>1</sup>

In the United States, the most common form of cancer is skin cancer. While some groups are at higher risk for developing skin cancer, anyone, regardless of age and race, can get it. The two main layers of the skin are the epidermis and dermis. Skin cancer develops in the epidermis, which is the upper/outer layer of the skin and is made up of three types of cells: squamous cells, basal cells, and melanocytes.

#### Common types of skin cancer:

- **Basal and squamous cell carcinoma** are the most common type of skin cancer, developing in the basal and squamous cell layers of the skin, respectively. These cancers are usually treatable.
- **Melanoma** is the third most common skin cancer and the deadliest. This type of cancer develops in the melanocytes of the epidermis, which are the cells that give the skin its color.

### SUN SAFETY

Most skin cancers are due to overexposure of ultraviolet (UV) rays. This can be from the sun, tanning beds, and/or sunlamps. A change in skin color or tan after UV exposure is a sign of injury to the skin. Despite this, the American Academy of Dermatology reported that in a recent survey, one-third of Americans lack basic knowledge on skin cancer and sun exposure. <sup>2</sup>The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) reported that 35.2% of Harford residents rarely or never protect themselves from the sun. <sup>3</sup>

#### How often residents protect themselves from the sun, 2019 <sup>3</sup>

	Harford	Maryland
Always	21.3%	21.8%
Most of the time	34.5%	27.8%
Sometimes	29.5%	19.9%
Rarely	22.7%	14.4%
Never	12.5%	15.3%

*\*when going outside on a warm sunny day for more than an hour, BRFSS, 2019.*

### MELANOMA

Harford County has the 4th highest rate of Melanoma out of the 24 counties in Maryland. In addition, incidence rates are about 40% higher in Harford County compared to Maryland as a whole. <sup>4</sup>

#### Incidence of Melanomas of the Skin, 2014-2018 <sup>4</sup>

	Harford	Maryland	United States
Rate per 100,000	39.9	24.1	23

Using sun safety recommendations, such as wearing sunscreen, a wide brim hat, seeking shade, avoiding being outside between 10am and 4pm, and not using tanning beds are important prevention methods for skin cancer. Early detection and paying attention to abnormal moles can also improve health outcomes for melanoma and other skin cancers. <sup>1</sup>

### SPOTLIGHT: POLICY & SUN SAFETY

Over the years there have been best practices from a policy and programmatic level that have been implemented to prevent skin cancer. Some examples are free sunscreen dispensers at parks or adding more shading at playgrounds. <sup>1</sup>

In Maryland, there have been legislation over the past few years to address sun safety. As of October 1 2019, Maryland tanning facilities are no longer able to allow minors under the age of 18 to use a tanning device. <sup>3</sup> There has been a national decline in indoor tanning bed usage in high school students over the past few years, which may be due to other states making similar legislation. <sup>6</sup>

In 2018, Maryland passed a law that allows students to carry sunscreen in schools. <sup>7</sup> The law also encourages schools to educate kids about sun safety guidelines. While it may take years to see results of these laws, it reinforces the need for leaders and policymakers to address the misinformation and unhealthy behaviors surrounding skin cancer.

**Sources:**

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