

ADVANTAGE

Skin Cancer

If you have any concerns about whether your plan covers the subject matter discussed in Advantage, please contact your NMG Benefits Healthcare Advisor.

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What is skin cancer?

Skin cancer arises when there is uncontrolled and abnormal growth of normal cells. There are generally 3 major types: **melanoma, basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC).**

Melanoma is the most malignant of the three which can also spread or metastasize to other parts of the body. Complications depend on the site involved and whether there are metastases or not. Most of the time the suspicious lesions are detected early, biopsied and managed without the need for prolonged treatment. However there is always a need for careful follow-up.

Other cancers also exist, including those that have spread from other parts of the body, but these three are primary malignancies of the skin and the specific skin cells affected differentiates them from each other. BCC is the most common type.



What causes skin cancer?

- Ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun
- High exposure to x-rays
- Low immunity
- Certain chemicals

What are the risk factors?

Anybody can get skin cancer, including indigenous African people, however some groups are at increased risk. In addition, there are known conditions that predispose one to developing the condition. These include:

- Albinism
- Light skin with easy freckling increases one's risk. Having lots of moles, especially from birth, also increases one's risk
- People with low levels of melanin, i.e. those with light hair and blue or green eyes
- A personal or family history of skin cancer

What are the symptoms?

Generally the cancerous lesions start in sun-exposed areas, but this is not always the case. There is no one definitive sign that is suggestive of malignancy, however the following are some features that raise suspicion and warrant further investigation by a doctor, preferably a dermatologist:

- A sore or ulcer that does not heal
- Progressive and persistent change in size, shape and colour in a skin lesion
- An asymmetrical mole with irregular borders or margins
- Sudden bleeding in a previously existing mole
- New-onset itching and pain in a mole

What is the treatment and complications?



Determine what type of cancer one has



It can involve a biopsy or a combination of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy

What can I do to prevent it?



Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun



Use sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB



A minimum of a SPF 30 sunscreen must be used



Regular skin self-examinations must be done to help become familiar with all moles and other dark spots so that new lesions are easily detectable.