

## Exposure to UV radiation from the sun:

UV radiation from the sun causes damage to skin. The main effects include sunburn, blistering, skin ageing, and in the long term may lead to skin cancer. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the UK, with over 40,000 new cases diagnosed each year.

### There are three main types of skin cancer:

#### 1. Basal cell carcinoma (rodent ulcer)

This type of cancer is usually found in people over 60. It is often linked with years of working outdoors, outdoor sports, or life in the tropics. The most likely sites are on the face and hair-bearing skin. Appearance may vary, but there is often a nodule which slowly grows to 0.5cm over a couple of years. It may look translucent or pigmented, and may develop a raised pearly border with a non-healing ulcer in the centre. This type of cancer does not usually spread to form secondary cancers, however early treatment is vital to prevent extensive tissue damage around the site of the cancer.

#### 2. Squamous cell carcinoma

This type of skin cancer mainly occurs in older people usually following long exposure to UV radiation as in outdoor work. Appearance is usually of a warty lump, nodule, ulcer, or sore which does not heal. Squamous cell carcinomas also have a very high cure rate, but early treatment is vital in order to prevent tissue damage.

#### 3. Malignant melanoma

The incidence of malignant melanoma is increasing in Britain, and the rest of the world, although it is still much rarer than the other types of skin cancer. If untreated malignant melanoma spreads to other organs, however if it is diagnosed and treated early there is a very good chance of a cure. Most melanomas start on a pigmented area of skin. You should seek medical advice if a mole:

- Is getting larger or a new one is growing
- Has an irregular outline
- Has a mixture of different shades of brown or black
- Is bigger than the blunt end of a pencil (7mm)
- Has an inflamed or reddish edge
- Is bleeding, oozing or crusting

- Starts to feel itchy or painful

### **Who is at risk?**

Anyone whose work involves a lot of time spent outside is potentially at risk. Some skin types are more prone to skin cancer than others. People with white skin are at most risk, and in particular those who have:

- Fair or freckled skin which doesn't tan, or goes red or burns before tanning
- Red or fair hair and light coloured eyes
- A large amount of moles (over 100 in young people, or over 50 in older people)

### **How to protect yourself:**

It is important to remember that you can still burn, even if you already have a tan, and even if it does not feel very hot and is overcast and windy. To protect yourself from the harmful UV radiation from the sun it is important to:

- Wear clothing which acts as a physical barrier to the sun's harmful rays. Tightly woven clothing gives the best protection.
- Wear a hat, especially one with a brim or flap which covers the ears and the back of the neck, as these are areas which often get sunburnt.
- Protect exposed skin with sunscreen. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Reapply regularly as directed, and especially if sweating.
- Take breaks in the shade.
- Check your skin regularly for any unusual spots or moles, and see a doctor promptly if you find any which are changing in size, shape or colour, or is itching or bleeding. Tell your doctor that you work outdoors.

### **Sources of Guidance and Advice:**

[Keep your top on: Health risks from working in the sun](#) (HSE)