



**Melanoma** Skin Cancer

A large magnifying glass with a black frame and handle is positioned over a close-up of human skin. A small, dark mole is visible on the skin, centered within the magnifying glass's lens. The background is a solid yellow color.

**& PROTECT  
& INSPECT<sup>TM</sup>  
YOUR SKIN**

# Skin Cancer

This leaflet aims to help you to identify changes in your skin which could indicate the presence of a melanoma. Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland. The vast majority of these cancers are associated with overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, mainly from sunlight. However, UV radiation from artificial sources (e.g. sunbeds) also causes skin cancer.

Of the different types of skin cancer, melanoma is not the most common but raises the greatest concern as if not detected early, it can spread to other parts of the body, where it becomes difficult to treat and can be fatal.

## Protect & Inspect

However, the good news is that you can reduce your risk of developing a melanoma by avoiding overexposure to UV radiation from sunlight or artificial sources. If you find a suspicious growth on your skin, you should always see your doctor as melanoma can be completely cured if it is identified and removed early.

## What is a melanoma?

Melanoma is a type of cancer that arises in the pigment-producing skin cells called melanocytes. Melanocytes produce a pigment called melanin that gives skin, eyes and hair their colour. The first sign of a melanoma is often a change in the colour of a mole (becoming either darker or lighter). Moles\* are normal noncancerous clusters of melanocytes and having 20-40 moles is not unusual. Although a melanoma can develop in an existing mole, it can also appear as a new growth that continues to change.

## Risk factors for melanoma

While anyone can develop a melanoma, several factors can increase the risk.

- Occasional, intense sun exposure
- Sunburn, particularly during childhood
- Sunbed use
- A previous melanoma or other non-melanoma skin cancer
- Multiple large or unusual moles
- Immunosuppression
- Many moles (of different sizes, shapes and colours)
- A fair complexion: pale skin, blue eyes, red/blonde hair, freckles
- A family history of melanoma

\*A mole is more correctly referred to as a 'melanocytic naevus' (spelled 'nevus' in the USA and 'nevi' to indicate more than one mole). You may hear your doctor use some or all of these terms or encounter them online yourself.

## What is solar ultraviolet radiation?

UV radiation is one of the three major components of sunlight, which include visible light and infrared (heat). The two types of UV radiation that we need to be concerned about are UVA and UVB.

## What is the Global Solar UV index?

The Global Solar UV index is a scale that was developed by the World Health Organisation which measures the UV radiation level at the surface of the Earth, and gives an indication of the potential for skin damage.



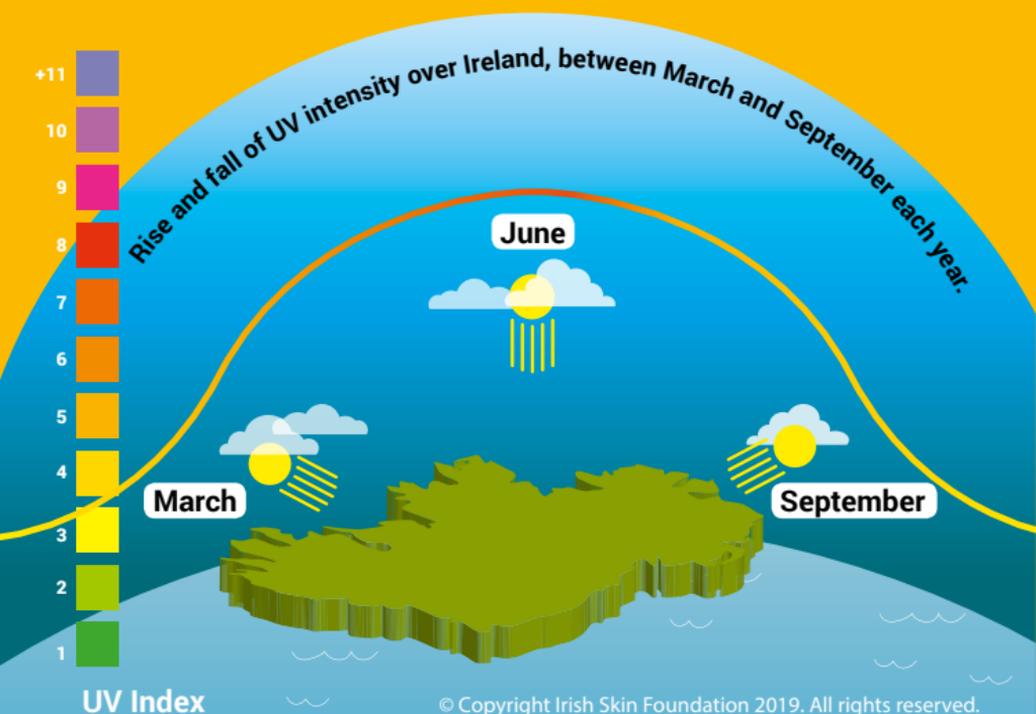
Overexposure to UV radiation can cause sunburn, skin and eye damage (including cataracts) and skin cancer. The UV index ranges from zero upwards – the higher the UV index, the greater the risk.

UV radiation levels are influenced by many factors, including: your location (latitude and altitude), time of day, time of year, cloud cover and reflection.

UV radiation cannot be seen or felt (infrared radiation causes heat, not UV) so you need to defend yourself against overexposure.

## Know the UV index

In Ireland, make sun protection part of your daily routine particularly from April – September, when the UV index is usually 3 or above, even when it is cloudy.



# Protect your skin

## Watch the UV index:



When the UV index is 3 or above, you need to protect your skin. Stay safe by limiting time in the midday sun when UV is strongest, typically between the hours of 11:00am-3:00pm.

## Remember the five 'Ss' of sun safety:

1.



**Slip** on clothing: Cover skin as much as possible e.g. wear long sleeves, collared t-shirts, clothes made from close-woven material that does not allow sunlight through.

2.



**Slop** on broad-spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30+ for adults and 50+ for children, with high UVA protection, and water resistant. Reapply regularly.

3.



**Slap** on a hat with a wide brim: Protect your face, ears and neck.

4.



**Seek** shade: Sit in cover of trees to avoid direct sunlight and use a sunshade on your buggy or pram. Keep babies and children out of direct sunlight.

5.



**Slide** on sunglasses with UV protection: Guard your eyes from harm.



### Protect your family:

Babies and young children are particularly vulnerable to sun exposure.



### Remember:

No sunbathing, no sunburning and never ever use a sunbed.



# Most people don't apply sunscreen correctly. Here's how it's done:

**Correct amount:** You should apply at least one teaspoon to each body part.



- Head/face/neck
- Each arm
- Each leg
- Your front
- Your back

**Correct locations:** Don't forget your ears, your neck, your nose, the tops of your feet and (if your hair is thinning) your scalp!

**Correct timing:** Apply sunscreen at least 20-30 minutes before you go out in the sun.

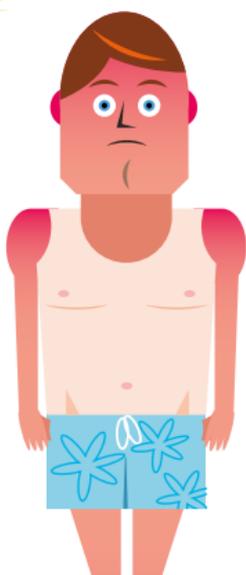
**Correct frequency:** Reapply frequently, at least every two hours and after exercising, sweating, swimming, or towel drying.

**Correct use:** No sunscreen can provide 100% protection, it should be used alongside other protective measures such as clothing and shade.

**Know your medications:** Some medicines can increase sensitivity to sunlight.

**Remember:** No sunbathing and no sunburning.

**Home or abroad:** Whether at home or abroad, if the UV index is 3 or above, sun protection is required.



# What warning signs should you look out for?



Anything **new, different** and **changing**.

Be alert for a new and changing mole, or the change in appearance of an existing mole.

Things to watch out for include: changes in shape, colour, size or if you notice bleeding, itch, pain or ulceration. The **ABCDE** method indicates some changes to look for, to help detect a melanoma.

## ABCDE Method

### A: ASYMMETRY



### B: BORDER irregularity



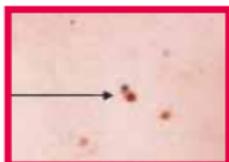
### C: COLOUR variations



### D: DIAMETER over 6mm



### E: EVOLVING or changing



Benign Mole

Malignant Melanoma

Not all melanomas follow the clues of ABCDE. You should check any skin growth that is changing.

## The 'Ugly Duckling' method

A person's 'normal' moles tend to look alike, resembling each other in shape, colour and size. Check for any mole that is different from the others, the so called 'ugly duckling'.

## Inspect your skin

Melanomas can occur anywhere on the body, including areas that are protected from the sun. It is important to be familiar with your own skin so that you will notice any changes. The majority of melanomas are detected by the person affected themselves, or their partners. Ideally you should inspect your skin once a month. Check the whole of your body from head to toe. Undress completely.

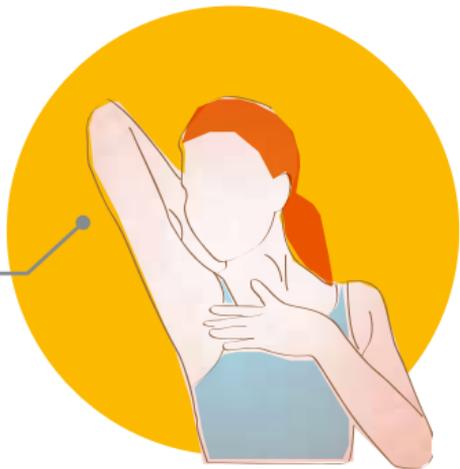
### Use a well-lit room for self-skin examination

Check your head, face and neck. Use a mirror to examine behind your ears. A hairdryer can be useful when checking your scalp.



Check your front, from your chest right down to your hips. Use a mirror to inspect your back, or ask your partner, a family member or friend.

Check arms, underarms and both sides of hands, including nails.



Examine lower body, checking buttocks, genitalia, front and back of legs, both feet including the soles, in between the toes and toenails (look out for a dark spot under the finger or toenail).

If you are concerned about a change or growth on your skin, you should always see your GP or dermatologist.

# Visit [www.irishskin.ie](http://www.irishskin.ie) to read about

- Acne
- Atopic Eczema
- Hidradenitis Suppurativa (HS)
- Psoriasis
- Sun damage and skin cancer
- Information and resources about other skin conditions

## You can also

- Ask a dermatology nurse a question
- Sign up for our newsletter
- See our events calendar
- Donate to support our work
- Read about advocacy and research

This leaflet has been prepared by the Irish Skin Foundation (ISF) in consultation with people affected by melanoma, dermatology nurses and consultant dermatologists.

The prevention of skin cancer caused by natural and artificial UV radiation is the particular emphasis of the ISF's work in the area of skin cancer.

More detailed information see:  
[www.irishskin.ie/protect-and-inspect/](http://www.irishskin.ie/protect-and-inspect/)

## Irish Skin Foundation

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