

Fact Sheet

SKIN CANCER

Queensland¹

- ✦ 2,927 Queenslanders were diagnosed with a melanoma of the skin in 2008 (the latest figures available), with 282 dying from the disease.
- ✦ Of the 2,927 diagnosed, 1,744 were male and 1,183 were female.
- ✦ In 2008, melanoma was the second leading form of cancer diagnosed in men and women.
- ✦ In 2008, 35 Queenslanders died from other skin cancers, excluding basal cell carcinomas (BCC) and squamous cell carcinomas (SCC) of the skin.
- ✦ Queensland has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world.
- ✦ The approximate lifetime risk of a Queensland male to be diagnosed with melanoma before the age of 85 is one in 11, and for females it is one in 19.²
- ✦ Compared to the general population, 93.7 per cent of people diagnosed with melanoma will survive for at least five years (92.4 per cent of men and 95.6 per cent of women).
- ✦ Approximately 133,000 non-melanoma skin cancer cases are diagnosed in Queensland each year.³

Australia⁴

- ✦ Two in three Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer by the time they are 70.
- ✦ Skin cancers account for 80 per cent of all new cancers diagnosed each year in Australia, making it by far the most common cancer diagnosed.
- ✦ Around 434,000 Australians are treated for non-melanoma skin cancer annually – which is more than 1,000 people every day.
- ✦ Mortality is low, with 448 Australians (305 males, 143 females) dying from non-melanoma skin cancer in 2007.⁵
- ✦ More than 10,000 Australians are treated for melanoma each year and more than 1,200 Australians die from melanoma each year.
- ✦ Skin cancer appears to be increasing rapidly in Australia.
- ✦ Nearly three quarters of a million suspected skin cancers are removed in Australia annually.³
- ✦ There were almost 80,000 hospital separations due to non-melanoma skin cancer in Australia in the 2006-07 financial year.⁶

¹ Queensland Cancer Registry. 2011. *Cancer in Queensland: Incidence, Mortality, Survival and Prevalence 1982-2008*. Brisbane: QCR, Queensland Health and Cancer Council Queensland.

² Queensland Cancer Statistics On-Line, 2011. Viertel Centre for Research in Cancer Control, Cancer Council Queensland (www.cancerqld.org.au/research/qcsol). Based on data released by the Queensland Cancer Registry (1982-2008; released November 2011).

³ NCCI Non-melanoma Skin Cancer Working Group 2003, *The 2002 national non-melanoma skin cancer survey*, Canberra.

⁴ Cancer Council Australia. *Skin cancer facts and figures*. Retrieved March 2009 from www.cancer.org.au/cancersmartlifestyle/SunSmart/Skincancerfactsandfigures.htm.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health & Welfare 2010. *ACIM (Australian Cancer Incidence and Mortality) books: Non-melanoma skin cancer* (<http://www.aihw.gov.au/acim-books/>). Canberra: AIHW.

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Types of skin cancer⁷

There are three main types of skin cancer:

1. **Melanoma** – Melanoma is the rarest, yet most dangerous form of skin cancer. It can appear at any age and on any area of the body, not only those exposed to the sun. The first sign of a melanoma is usually a change in a freckle or mole, or the appearance of a new spot on normal skin. There may be a change in size, shape or colour of a spot and the surface texture may change. Early detection is vital.
2. **Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)** – SCCs arise from the cells above the basal layer of the epidermis. They grow more rapidly than BCCs and may become larger over a number of months. SCCs usually appear as a flat, scaly area that gradually thickens. Bleeding and ulceration may occur and the area could feel tender. SCCs predominantly occur on the head and neck, hands and forearms, trunk and lower limbs. These cancers may spread to other parts of the body if not treated.
3. **Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)** – BCCs are the most common but least dangerous form of skin cancer and the most easily treated. They are a malignant tumour formed in the basal cell layer of the skin. They usually appear as a small, rounded lump with a pearly edge and a few visible blood vessels. Other symptoms include bleeding and a sore which will not heal. BCCs occur mainly in exposed areas such as the head and neck, upper trunk and the limbs.

Prevention and detection⁷

* Cancer Council Queensland recommends the use of all the following sun protection measures:

- Minimise time in the sun between 10am and 3pm;
- Seek shade provided by trees, buildings or temporary shade structures wherever possible;
- Wear suitable clothing that provides good sun protection. Clothes that are dark in colour and fabrics with a close weave provide the most effective form of sun protection;
- Hats with a broad-brim or in a legionnaire or bucket style provide the best coverage protecting the face, neck and ears. Hats should be of a dark colour under the brim to minimise reflection and a close fabric weave is also recommended;
- Wearing sunglasses minimises the risk of eye damage from ultraviolet radiation. Sunglasses sold in Australia must conform to the Australian Standard AS/NZ 1067:2003; and
- SPF30+ broad-spectrum water resistant sunscreen should be applied 20 minutes before going out in the sun.

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Cancer Australia 2008. *Non-melanoma skin cancer: general practice consultations, hospitalisation and mortality*. Cancer series no. 43. Cat. no. 39. Canberra: AIHW.

⁷ Queensland Cancer Fund 2007, *SunSmart Information Sheet*, Queensland Cancer Fund.

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- ✦ It is important that Queenslanders regularly examine their skin for signs of skin cancer, especially if they are in the older age group and/or have sun-damaged skin or multiple moles and freckles.⁵

Who is at risk?

- ✦ People most at risk of skin cancer are:
 - People with fair skin and blue eyes (they have the least amount of melanin);
 - People with a lot of outdoors exposure – such as farm workers, construction workers and people working on fishing boats;
 - Urban indoor workers who spend weekends or holidays in the sun;
 - People who were sunburnt or had high levels of exposure to the sun as children (exposure to sun in childhood and adolescence does the most damage).⁷
- ✦ Whilst some people have a greater risk than others do, it is important to understand that everyone is at risk of skin cancer.

General Information

- ✦ Skin cancer occurs when the UV light in sunlight damages the DNA in skin, causing cells to mutate and grow into cancers.⁷
- ✦ Skin cancers (including melanomas) are predominantly caused by overexposure to ultraviolet radiation.
- ✦ Solariums can emit UV radiation up to five times as strong as the summer midday sun.⁸
- ✦ The most common form of skin cancer is basal cell carcinoma, which accounts for about 75 per cent of all skin cancers. Squamous cell carcinoma accounts for 20 per cent and melanoma less than five per cent.⁹

For more information about skin cancer, please call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

Disclaimer: The information in this publication should not be used as a substitute for advice from a properly qualified medical professional who can advise you about your own individual medical needs. It is not intended to constitute medical advice and is provided for general information purposes only. Information on cancer, including the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer, is constantly being updated and revised by medical professionals and the research community.

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⁸ Standards Australia 2002, *AS/NZS 2635:2002 Solaria for Cosmetic Purposes*, Canberra.

⁹ The Cancer Council South Australia 2006, *Skin Cancer*. Retrieved September 2006 from <http://www.cancersa.org.au>.

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