

## Kids and Melanoma

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer arising from specialized cells called melanocytes that live in the most superficial layer of the skin. Melanocytes release melanin, which gives the skin a tan or brown color. Melanin also gives moles and freckles their darker color. Melanin is part of the body's defense mechanism to protect the deeper layers of skin from sun damage.

In adults, melanoma typically appears as a multi-colored, darkly pigmented mole with irregular borders. In children, however, the cancer may appear as a lighter colored skin lesion with regular borders. The biggest and most preventable risk factor for melanoma is exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or tanning lamps. Other risk factors include a family history of melanoma, light skin color, and having lots of moles.

Most lifetime sun exposure occurs during childhood. Protect your child from the sun's harmful UV rays by using sunscreen and avoiding prolonged outdoor activities during peak UV hours (10 am – 4 pm). If you see a new, unusual appearing spot on your child's skin, ask your child's pediatrician to check it out.

Resources (Accessed 10/2/05)\*

Overview – Skin Cancer: Melanoma, by the American Cancer Society

[http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/CRI\\_2\\_1x.asp?dt=39](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/CRI_2_1x.asp?dt=39)

“Sun Care Information”, by the Rocky Mountain Region Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit

[http://rmphehsu.org/docs/Sun\\_care\\_info.pdf](http://rmphehsu.org/docs/Sun_care_info.pdf)

“Melanoma, a rising threat to children”, published in the newspaper “Tallahassee Democrat”, Knight Ridder Newspapers, based on study published July 2005 in the Journal of Clinical Oncology

<http://www.tallahassee.com/mld/tallahassee/news/nation/12781789.htm>

\* If the addresses listed above are no longer valid, try searching the internet by the title of the document and/or author