

## Learning the ABC's of Mole Detection Can Save Lives

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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - Just like in grade school, one of the rudimentary lessons children are taught are the ABC's. One of the most important lessons adults need to learn are the ABCDE's of skin cancer detection, especially the warning signs of potentially cancerous moles which can appear on any part of the body. **Dr. Rebecca Baxt is a prominent NYC/NJ board certified dermatologist who firmly believes that early detection of skin cancer can play a key role in saving peoples lives.** All it takes is remembering the alphabet and

checking your own skin for warning signs. Follow the ABCDE's! If your mole has any of these warning signs see your dermatologist.

**A-Asymmetry.** One side does not match the other side of the mole if you were to draw a line in the middle of the lesion.

**B-Border Irregularity.** If the perimeter of the mole is jagged and irregular rather than smooth.

**C-Color Variation.** Bad colors are the flag colors-red, white and blue. Also black. Also more than one color in the mole is a warning sign. Light brown or medium brown for the whole mole is usually normal.

**D-Diameter.** Smaller than the size of a pencil eraser is usually a good sign, but not always. If the mole has other warning signs, but is small, still see your doctor.

**E-Evolving.** The mole is changing in any way-itchy, bleeding, growing, irritated, painful, changing color. Patients often find their own skin cancers and save their own lives by bringing evolving moles to their doctors attention.

**Dr. Baxt** recommends that, "everyone should conduct a thorough, full body self skin exam to check for the presence of irregular moles. This should occur in spite of what their family's medical history is or their skin type. This should be done at least every few months and at least once a year by a dermatologist. Use a hand held mirror if needed, or ask a friend or family member to look at your back." **Dr. Baxt** recommends starting at the top with the scalp, this is especially important for people who have thinning hair or baldness. A hat is the best way to protect the scalp from sun. Gel or spray sunscreens often work well on the scalp in addition to a hat. After checking the scalp for moles, people should proceed to the neck, ears, and face, looking closely at the eyelids, lips, and corners of the nose which can often be overlooked. The other area, surprisingly, and especially among women who are quick to use sunscreen to ward off the aging effects of the sun on their faces, are the legs. The number one spot for melanomas among women are the legs, and this is especially true for women who often seek to tan the lower extremities.

"Don't forget it is important to look underneath the arms, around the genitalia, on the legs, feet, and even between the toes. Many people mistakenly think that if an area such as between the toes are not exposed to the sun, then they are not at risk for melanoma. This is absolutely false." Melanoma, can also be genetically determined, therefore; sometimes occurring in non-sun exposed areas. "A suspicious growth does not always signal melanoma," says Dr. Baxt. "It could be a basal cell skin cancer, a squamous cell, or a dysplastic mole." Some dermatologists do feel that these dysplastic moles which are benign, can be precursors to malignant melanoma. "Many times," says Dr. Baxt, "we see severely dysplastic moles or a history of melanoma which can be grouped into a syndrome called dysplastic nevus syndrome. Those who fall into this category need to be closely monitored. Statistically, their chances of developing melanoma can be higher." Even those people without a history of suspicious moles should obtain a complete skin exam once a year by a dermatologist.

Who is most at risk for melanoma? "Everyone is at risk," says Dr. Baxt. "There have even been some cases of African Americans developing melanoma. In darker skinned patients it is more likely that the skin cancer will be on the hands and feet. Everyone can take steps to avoid melanoma by protecting the skin from the sun through the use of a sunscreen containing an SPF 30 or higher." It may be surprising to some, but a tan is the body's defense mechanism against ultraviolet light. Even those who tan rather than burn are at risk. "People are also misguided regarding the use of tanning beds," says Dr. Baxt.

"Tanning booths have been popular for some time. Although the UV rays emitted from the bulb are UVA rays rather than the UVB rays more commonly associated with burning, the UVA rays penetrate deeper in the skin and cause premature aging and wrinkling."

At present, there is a higher incidence of melanoma than ever before, which is thought to be due in part, to the thinning ozone layer. Each year, over 1 million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the United States. It is the most common cancer diagnosed in America today -- and can be one of the most curable if caught early. It is also perhaps THE most preventable form of cancer. Taking precautionary measures against the sun, avoiding tanning beds, as well as following the ABCDE's, can drastically reduce the incidence of melanoma, or aid in early detection. The bottom line is our goal is that no one die of skin cancer, in particular melanoma--in the early stages it is often 100% curable.