

Data Brief

Melanoma Skin Cancer in West Virginia Spring 2024



There are three primary types of skin cancer: basal cell, squamous cell, and melanoma. Of these, melanoma is less common, but is much more dangerous. Melanoma is more likely to spread to other parts of the body (or metastasize) than the other two skin cancers (1).

Melanoma develops in melanocytes, cells found in the skin that produces the pigment that colors our skin. Melanomas can occur anywhere on the skin, but are most commonly found on the neck and face. Men tend to develop melanoma on the chest and back, while women tend to develop melanoma on the legs. Melanoma, when caught in its early stages, has a favorable prognosis. However, melanoma can be fatal if not treated early enough (1).

Quick Stats:

- Case counts of melanoma skin cancer have increased about 64% between 2000 and 2019 (2).
- Melanoma is the 6th most commonly diagnosed cancer in both men and women (2).
- West Virginia ranks 30th in the nation for melanoma skin cancer incidence, and 2nd in the nation for melanoma skin cancer mortality (3).
- The counties with the highest incidence rates of melanoma skin cancer are Putnam, Webster, Pleasants, Boone, and Ohio (2).

Between 2016-2020, 2,650 melanomas were diagnosed in West Virginia, which is about 530 diagnoses per year (Figure 1) (3). Additionally, 346 melanoma cancer deaths were reported in this time frame, which is an average of 69 deaths per year (Figure 2) (3). In general, men in West Virginia are about 1.4 times more likely to develop melanoma than women.

Figure 1: Annual Age-Adjusted Incidence Rates and Counts of Melanoma Skin Cancers by Sex, West Virginia, 2016-2020 (3)

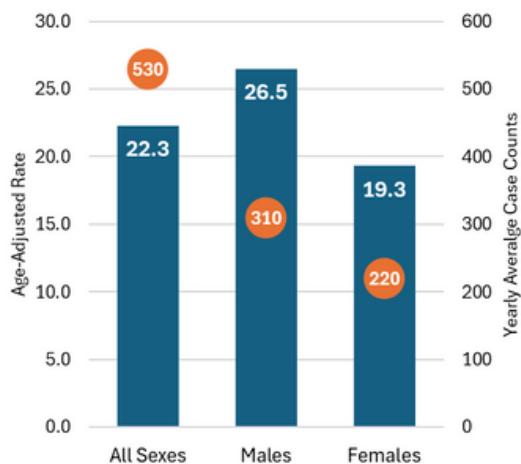
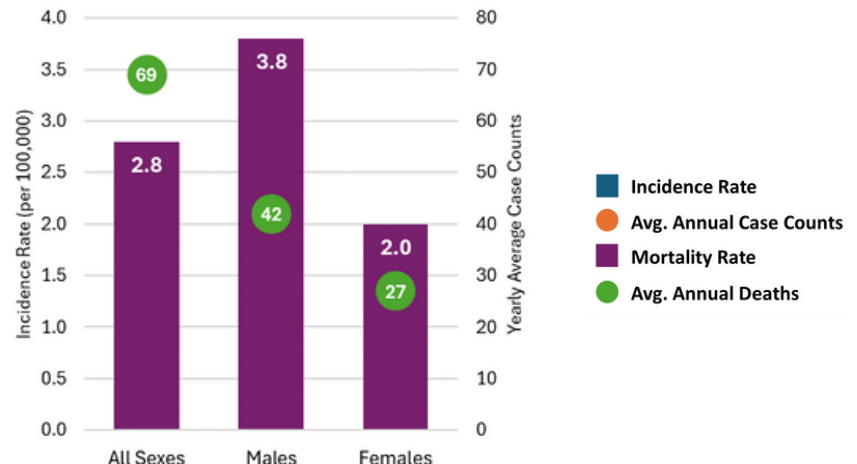


Figure 2: Annual Age-Adjusted Mortality Rates and Counts of Melanoma Skin Cancers by Sex, West Virginia, 2016-2020 (3)



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There are several cancer risk factors for melanoma skin cancer. One risk factor that can be controlled is exposure to Ultraviolet (UV) light: UV light can come from various sources, like sunlight, tanning beds, and sun lamps. Risk factors that cannot be controlled include having many moles or atypical moles, and having red or blonde hair, blue or green eyes, and/or fair skin that freckles. Another risk factor is age and sex; melanoma cancer risk tends to be higher in West Virginia women before age 50, while risk is higher for men after age 50 (Figure 3) (4).

A change in your skin is the most common sign of skin cancer. This could be in the form of a new growth, a sore that won't heal, or a change in a mole. A simple way to remember the warning signs of melanoma is to remember the **A-B-C-D-Es** of melanoma (Figure 4) (2,4):

Figure 3: Percent Distribution of Melanoma Skin Cancers by Sex and Age Group, West Virginia, 2016-2020 (2)

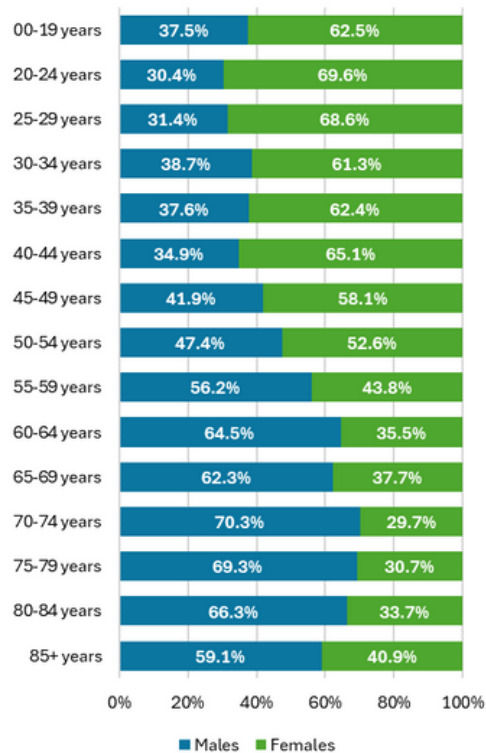
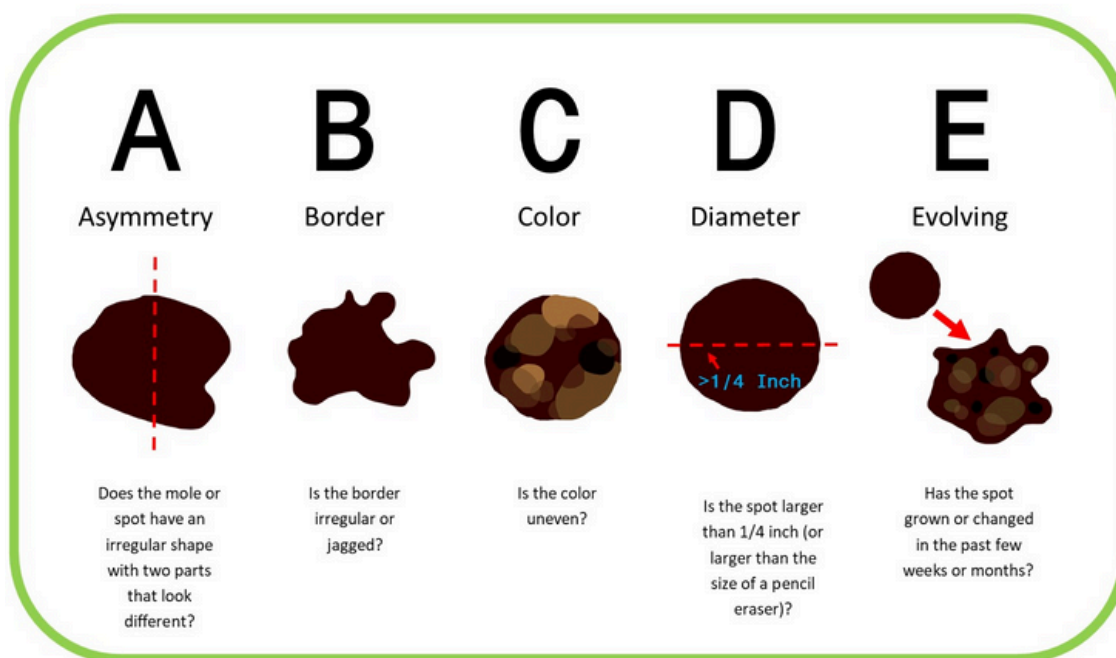


Figure 4: A-B-C-D-Es of Detecting Melanoma Skin Cancer (4)



References:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What is Skin Cancer? https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/what-is-skin-cancer.htm. Accessed March 2024.
- West Virginia Cancer Registry
- U.S. Cancer Statistics Working Group. U.S. Cancer Statistics Data Visualizations Tool, based on 2022 submission data (1999-2020): U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Cancer Institute; <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/dataviz>, released in November 2023.
- American Cancer Society. Risk Factors for Melanoma Skin Cancer. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/melanoma-skin-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html>. Accessed March 2024.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What Are the Symptoms?. https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/symptoms.htm. Accessed March 2024.

Member Spotlight: Natalie Thomas

Natalie Thomas, melanoma survivor and Mountains of Hope (MOH) member, partnered with IMPACT Melanoma, a national organization focused on preventing melanoma in the US, to encourage sun safety and skin cancer prevention in Kanawha County, her home county. Natalie worked with her dermatologist to purchase a sunscreen dispenser for use at various events across Charleston in 2022. Afterward, the city of Nitro worked with Natalie and IMPACT Melanoma to purchase their own sunscreen dispenser.



Based off this success, Natalie approached WV Health Right who agreed to purchase 20 dispensers to be placed around Kanawha and Putnam Counties in partnership with local businesses. Due to the success of the first 20 dispensers, WV Health Right agreed to purchase an additional 20 dispensers to extend the reach of sunscreen access in Kanawha and Putnam Counties.



Natalie continues to be active in the cancer prevention and quality of life space, and we are grateful to have her as a member of our cancer coalition.

WV Cancer Plan in Action

The MOH Prevention Subcommittee is focusing on Cancer Plan Aim 3 to reduce the incidence and mortality for cancers related to ultra-violet light exposure. To do this they are implementing an environmental change intervention with outdoor recreational and tourism settings to promote sun protective behaviors. Through a partnership with IMPACT Melanoma, MOH will place sunscreen dispensers in Mineral and Summers counties, both of which are listed in the top 10 counties for melanoma incidence in WV.

Prevention subcommittee members, Ellen Bernard and Liz Brooks, are championing the project in these counties by recruiting community partners to host placement of up to six dispensers in each county at pools, parks, schools, and other recreation areas. The project increases access to sunscreen in these communities and will have a lasting impact on skin cancer prevention.

What Can You Do?

- **As an individual:**
 - Practice sun safety by applying sunscreen and staying shaded
 - Educate your family and friends on the importance of sun safety
- **As a healthcare provider:**
 - Screen patients for skin cancer
 - Educate patients on sun safety
- **As a business:**
 - Provide sunscreen and shade for your employees
 - Sponsor additional sunscreen dispensers across the state
- **As a community or faith-based organization:**
 - Promote skin cancer screening
 - Sponsor additional sunscreen dispensers across the state