

Melanoma rates way up among young people in US

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Women account for two-thirds of cases, likely due to unsafe tanning, researchers say.

(HealthDay)—Melanoma, the potentially deadly skin cancer, has increased by 250 percent among U.S. children and young adults since the 1970s, researchers report.

Young women appear to be especially vulnerable, accounting for two-thirds of cases diagnosed in 2011, scientists at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, N.Y., reported.

"The reality is that [melanoma](#) is the third most common cancer in those 15 to 39 years old, and these numbers have been steadily increasing," said the study's senior author, Dr. Nikhil Khushalani, section chief for soft tissue and melanoma at the cancer institute.

The findings were scheduled for presentation this week at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, in Chicago. Research presented at meetings is usually considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

"This is a national problem that needs to be addressed, and it begins with awareness and effective prevention strategies," Khushalani said in a society news release.

The researchers uncovered some good news, however. Melanoma survival rates are also on the rise, increasing from 80 percent in the mid-to-late 1970s to 95 percent in 2011.

For the study, investigators analyzed more than 35,000 cases of melanoma among patients younger than age 40 and diagnosed between 1973 and 2011. Ninety-eight percent of the cases involved teens and young adults between 15 and 39.

While women accounted for 57 percent of melanomas reported between 1973 and 1980, they comprised about 65 percent of all diagnoses by 2011. The researchers said this is likely because of unsafe tanning practices. Sunbathing and indoor tanning are known risk factors for [skin cancer](#).

While 4 percent of melanoma cases diagnosed before 1980 were classified as noninvasive and early stage, these cancers accounted for more than 20 percent of all cases by 2011, the study also found.

"Given the epidemic rise of melanoma cases diagnosed among children, adolescents and [young adults](#), it is imperative that new research initiatives are implemented, genetic and environmental risk factors identified, and effective prevention and screening strategies employed," the study's lead author, oncology fellow Dr. Demytra Mitsis, said in the

news release.

More information: The American Academy of Dermatology provides more information on [melanoma](#).

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