

Skin cancer rates rise for hispanic, asian women

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Shifting preferences for tanning, along with belief that darker skin is protected, may explain trend.

(HealthDay)—While most white people who develop skin cancer are older men, the reverse is true in Asian and Hispanic populations, a new study suggests.

Researchers contend that shifting preferences for tanning among Asians and Hispanics in the United States—along with the belief that their darker skin protects them from the sun's harmful rays—may be contributing to rising [skin cancer](#) rates in both groups.

"I think the main point we were trying to bring home is that ethnic skin is not really thought of as at risk for skin cancer, but all ethnicities need to be mindful and diligent about getting their skin checked and

protecting themselves from the sun," said study author Dr. Arisa Ortiz, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at University of California, San Diego (UCSD).

The study is to be presented Friday at the American Academy of Dermatology's annual meeting in San Francisco. Research presented at scientific conferences typically has not been published or peer-reviewed, and results are considered preliminary.

More than 3.5 million cases of non-melanoma skin cancers are diagnosed in the United States each year, making it the most commonly diagnosed malignancy, according to the American Cancer Society.

Called non-melanomas to distinguish them from melanoma (a more aggressive and deadly type of skin cancer), these cancers develop on sun-exposed skin on the face, ears, neck, lips and back of the hands. They rarely spread to other areas of the body, and treatment typically involves removing the lesion.

Reviewing more than 4,000 cases of non-melanoma skin cancers in white, Hispanic and Asian patients who underwent a specific type of surgical removal of those cancers, Ortiz and her colleagues found that 96 percent of cases occurred in whites. Of those patients, 64 percent were men with an average age of 66.

But in Asians and Hispanics, these ratios were reversed, with about two-thirds of skin cancers occurring in women. Hispanic women were an average age of 62; Asian women were an average age of 70.

Because Hispanic and Asian populations in the United States are steadily increasing, the study authors had wanted to analyze skin cancer incidence in these groups. Hispanics, in particular, are the fastest-growing population in the United States, with a 43 percent rise in their

numbers between 2000 and 2010, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.

Asian cultures traditionally valued fair skin as a beauty standard, Ortiz said, but values may have shifted among immigrants' children and grandchildren to favor the U.S. preference for tanning.

Also, Asians and Hispanics may wrongly believe their darker skin protects them from skin cancer, she said. In fact, the rate of melanoma—far more deadly than non-melanoma skin cancers—rose 19 percent among Hispanics over the past two decades, according to a 2013 study in the journal *JAMA Dermatology*.

"It does protect them to some degree, but obviously we're seeing an increased risk, so they're not immune," said Ortiz, also director of laser and cosmetic dermatology at UCSD.

Dr. Maritza Perez, senior vice president of the Skin Cancer Foundation, agreed with Ortiz that non-melanoma skin cancers can present health problems far more pressing than just cosmetic concerns. Squamous cell carcinoma, one of the two types of non-melanoma skin cancers, can spread to other body parts and prove fatal, the experts said.

If non-melanoma skin cancers are left untreated, they can also invade tissues deeply enough to cause speaking or vision problems if located near the mouth or eyes, for example.

"It's important for all physicians, particularly dermatologists, to be trained and knowledgeable of different populations and how they're affected by different cancers," Perez said.

More information: The Skin Cancer Foundation offers [skin cancer facts](#).

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