

Spotting the signs of deadly melanoma skin cancers

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(HealthDay News)—Regular skin checks to look for signs of melanoma

could save your life.

Self-exams for the deadliest type of skin cancer should be done at least once a month in a well-lit room in front of a full-length mirror and also with a hand mirror for hard-to-see areas, said Dr. Arun Mavanur, a surgical oncologist.

You also need to get checked by a doctor if you have [risk factors](#) for [melanoma](#), such as: unprotected or excessive exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light; lesions or moles; a family history of melanoma; a personal history of skin cancer; a weakened [immune system](#); fair skin, freckling and light hair.

"Generally, if you're at increased risk for melanoma—especially if you have lesions or moles—you should be examined by a dermatologist at least once a year, if not twice a year," said Mavanur, who treats patients at the the Alvin & Lois Lapidus Cancer Institute at LifeBridge Health in Baltimore.

When doing a self-exam, he recommends you look for:

- a sore that bleeds or doesn't heal after a few weeks.
- a mole, wart-like growth, bump or spot that's new or changing in size, shape and color. (It can appear brown, black or multicolored.)
- a spot, sore or patch that continuously itches, crusts or bleeds.

If you detect these things, tell your primary care doctor and seek an immediate appointment with a dermatologist, Mavanur advised.

"Melanoma can happen at any age," he said. "It tends to be more common as one gets older because of [sun damage](#) to the skin over time."

The age at which a person should start seeing a dermatologist depends on their situation.

"For example, some people are exposed to the sun more often and incur sun-induced damage earlier than others, so those people should probably see a dermatologist sooner," Mavanur said.

"For someone with an average risk, probably in your mid-40s would be a good time to start, because that's when you start accumulating enough [skin](#) damage over time that you should see a [dermatologist](#) on a routine basis," he added.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more on [melanoma](#).

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