

Skin cancer above the neck more likely to spread, research shows

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New results from a descriptive, 6-month clinical study suggest that malignant melanoma (MM) that develops on the neck has a higher chance of spreading beyond the skin compared with MM that develops below the neck. However, even though significantly more of these study patients had below neck MM tumors at an advanced disease stage, none of them were found to have distant metastases, in which MM spreads to other distant parts of the body. Furthermore, only one of these below neck MM patients was diagnosed with positive lymph nodes. The study findings were presented today at the 28th EADV Congress in Madrid, Spain.

Forty-five patients with new diagnoses of MM were investigated over a period of 6 months and were divided into two groups of patients, with above [neck](#) MM and below neck MM. The aim of the study was to see which types of MM were more likely to metastasize (spread) in terms of location.

Researchers used computer tomography (CT) staging to determine the existence and spread of the cancer. Patients who had stage T2a or more disease were also offered a sentinel lymph node biopsy (SLNB) to further investigate the extent of the disease.

Results revealed that out of the 37 below neck MM patients, none of them had distant metastases and only one had positive nodes (2.7%). Out of the 8 above neck MM patients, two had positive nodes and distant metastases (25%). Therefore, the study showed that above neck MM has

a higher chance of spreading beyond the [skin](#) in comparison with below neck MM.

The most dangerous skin cancer

Malignant melanoma is the most dangerous type of skin cancer and is becoming progressively more common, especially in younger populations.¹ Once MM has spread deeper into the skin or other parts of the body, it becomes more difficult to treat and can be deadly. In addition, melanomas often have mutations in the BRAF V600 gene. These changes affect the production of the BRAF protein and make cells grow faster.

"A mutation in the gene encoding BRAF has been well demonstrated to occur in association with [malignant melanoma](#), and this has revolutionized further management in patients with advanced disease. In this study, we have reviewed new MM diagnoses to see which ones are more likely to metastasize in terms of location. Understanding more about these locations also may help to determine and manage a patient's survival," explained Dr. Mohammed Al Abadie lead researcher of the study, who presented the results at the EADV conference.

More information: 1. Swetter, SM., Clarke, CA., Hurley S. Continuous increase in melanoma incidence across all socioeconomic status groups in California. *J Invest dermatol.* 2017. Nov; 137(11): 2282-2290.

2. Yuxen, L., Saeed Sheikh, M., Melanoma molecular pathogenesis and therapeutic management. *Mol Cell Pharmacol.* 2014; 6(3): 228.

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