



EVERYBODY BENEFITS: EMPLOYEE GUIDE

Under the skin

Having a tan was once seen as an enviable sign of glowing health and wealth.

But times have changed and so has our understanding of the damage UV rays – the radiation from the sun and artificial sources – can cause, including increasing the risk of skin cancer.

The good news is that skin cancer is also one of the most preventable forms of cancer – and a few small changes can make a big difference.


Melanoma skin cancer is the **5th most common** cancer in the UK



What does it look like?

Skin cancer is not always easy to spot as early signs can be subtle, difficult to see, or easy to dismiss.

So, what do you need to look for? Here are the signs of the three main types of skin cancer.



2,600
deaths from
melanoma skin
cancer from
2022-24

Non-melanomas

Basal cell carcinoma (BCC)

BCC is the most common form of skin cancer in the UK, accounting for around 75% of all cases in the UK. It often develops in areas such as the head or neck which are exposed to the most sun and tends to grow quite slowly. It is also very unlikely to spread to other parts of the body.

What BCC might look like:

- A smooth, firm lump
- A lump that is sunken in the middle
- A flat patch of scaly, crusty or irritated skin
- A scar-like area of pale, shiny skin

Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)

This is the second most common type and grows more quickly than BCC. If left untreated, SCC can occasionally spread to other parts of the body, so early diagnosis matters.

What SCC might look like:

- A scaly, raised, rough area of skin
- A lump that may appear pink or red on lighter skin, but brown or black on black or brown skin
- A hard, crusty scab
- May feel tender or bleeds easily

Melanoma

Melanoma is less common than BCC or SCC, but it is the most serious type of skin cancer as it can spread to other parts of the body.

It often starts in or around a mole. A good way to remember what to look for is the ABCDE rule:

Asymmetrical: one half does not match the other

Border: edges are irregular or blurred

Colour: uneven or multiple colours

Diameter: larger than about 6mm wide (but they can be smaller if diagnosed early)

Evolving: changing over time

Get it checked

If you notice anything new or something has changed with your skin, don't wait. Book an appointment with your GP as soon as possible.

You may also be able to use a skin checking app, which lets you take a photo of the area you are concerned about for review by a clinician. They can then advise whether it needs further medical attention.

NHS-funded and private mole mapping can also offer more extensive mapping and detection services for those more susceptible to developing skin cancer.

How at risk are you?

Anyone can develop skin cancer, but some people are more at risk than others:

- Fair skin that burns easily
- Fair or red hair
- Lots of moles and freckles
- History of sunburn
- Spends lots of time outdoors
- Uses sunbeds
- Family history of skin cancer

Around
17,600 people
are diagnosed with
melanoma each year,
the most serious type
of skin cancer

Common myths

Myth 1

“Skin cancer only affects older people”

Not true. Skin cancer can affect people of any age.

While the risk does increase as we get older, the sun damage that causes skin cancer often begins early in life, making sun protection important from a young age.

Myth 2

“People of colour can’t get skin cancer”

While more melanin does offer more natural protection against UV damage, it is not a shield against skin cancer.

In fact, it often occurs in areas which get little sun exposure, such as the palms of your hands or soles of your feet. It is also often diagnosed later when it is harder to treat.

More than
150,000 cases
of non-melanoma skin
cancer are diagnosed
annually



Myth 3

“I don’t burn so I don’t need to worry”

Not necessarily. Skin damage can happen without obvious sunburn.

A tan might be seen as a healthy glow, but it is actually a sign that your skin has been damaged by UV exposure.

Myth 4

“Sun damage only happens when it’s hot and sunny”

It’s UV radiation, not heat, that damages the skin.

So even if it feels cool or cloudy, your skin can still be at risk.

Myth 5

“SPF means I can stay in the sun all day”

Sunscreen helps but it is not a free pass to bake in the heat for hours.

No SPF blocks 100% of UV rays and it works best when used alongside other steps like staying in the shade and covering up with clothes or hats.

How to protect yourself in the sun

Protecting your skin does not mean staying indoors. It just means being more mindful of when and how you're out in the sun.



Cover up

Clothing is one of the simplest ways to protect your skin. Think loose, long-sleeved tops, trousers or long skirts, a wide-brimmed hat and UV-protection sunglasses.



Seek shade

Shade is not just about keeping cool. It is also a simple way to cut down your exposure to UV rays, especially when the sun is strongest between 11am and 3pm.

Almost **90%** of melanoma cases are considered preventable, largely because they are linked to UV exposure from the sun or sunbeds



Rates of
melanoma in the
UK have **more than
doubled** since the
early 1990s



Use SPF properly

Use at least SPF 30 with a 4 or 5 star UVA rating and apply generously and regularly, especially if you have been in the water or sweating.

As a guide, the NHS recommends adults apply 6 to 8 teaspoons if they are covering their entire body. They recommend applying suncream 30 minutes before heading outside then reapplying just before you leave. It should also be reapplied at least every 2 hours.



Avoid sunbeds

Around 100 melanoma deaths in the UK each year are linked to sunbed use. There is no safe way to get a tan from a sunbed, so avoiding them altogether is one of the clearest ways to reduce your risk.



Check your skin


It helps to know what is normal for your skin, so that changes are easier to spot. A quick check once a month can be enough:

- Use a room with good lighting
- Get someone to help or use a mirror to check hard-to-see areas
- Don't forget your scalp - use a mirror, hairdryer or comb to help examine it carefully
- Check the less obvious places, such as between your fingers and soles of your feet
- Take photos and measure any moles or freckles you want to monitor so you can compare them over time

Sun safety at work

If your job involves spending lots of time outdoors, your employer has a responsibility to protect you from the sun.

Ask about access to shaded areas, flexible working to avoid the hottest hours of the day or being provided with a hat or appropriate clothing.



87% of
melanoma cases
are caused by
overexposure to
UV radiation

Check your benefits

Your employer may offer [benefits](#) that help you look after your skin and spot problems earlier:

- **Private medical insurance (PMI)** may cover dermatology appointments or mole mapping services
- Some **PMI, cash plans** and **group risk benefits** now include access to skin checking apps or services, allowing you to upload a photo of an area you are concerned about for review and advice on whether to seek further medical attention
- A **virtual GP** gives you fast access to a doctor if you spot something concerning and don't want to wait for an NHS GP appointment
- **Occupational health (OH)** support if you have concerns about UV exposure in your role
- Some employers may offer access to **specialist cancer support services**, either through an insurance policy or as a standalone benefit, to help with cancer guidance, screenings and treatment support
- **Employee assistance programme (EAP)** - if you receive a difficult diagnosis, an EAP can provide emotional support and guidance
- If you need to take long-term sickness absence, an **income protection policy** may provide financial support and access to rehabilitation services

More information

If you are looking for more advice and support on skin cancer, the organisations below are a good place to start:

- Skcin
- British Skin Foundation
- Melanoma UK
- Melanoma Focus
- NHS - Melanoma
- NHS - Non-melanoma
- Macmillan Cancer Support

There are also services available that can help you access skin checks and screening:

- MySkinDoctor (skin-checking app)
- Check4Cancer (skin cancer screenings and mole clinics)

92.7%
survive melanoma
skin cancer for 10
or more years





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0800 389 7723 (Monday to Friday)

Head office address

Everywhen
West Park House, 23 Cumberland Place,
Southampton, SO15 2BB

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