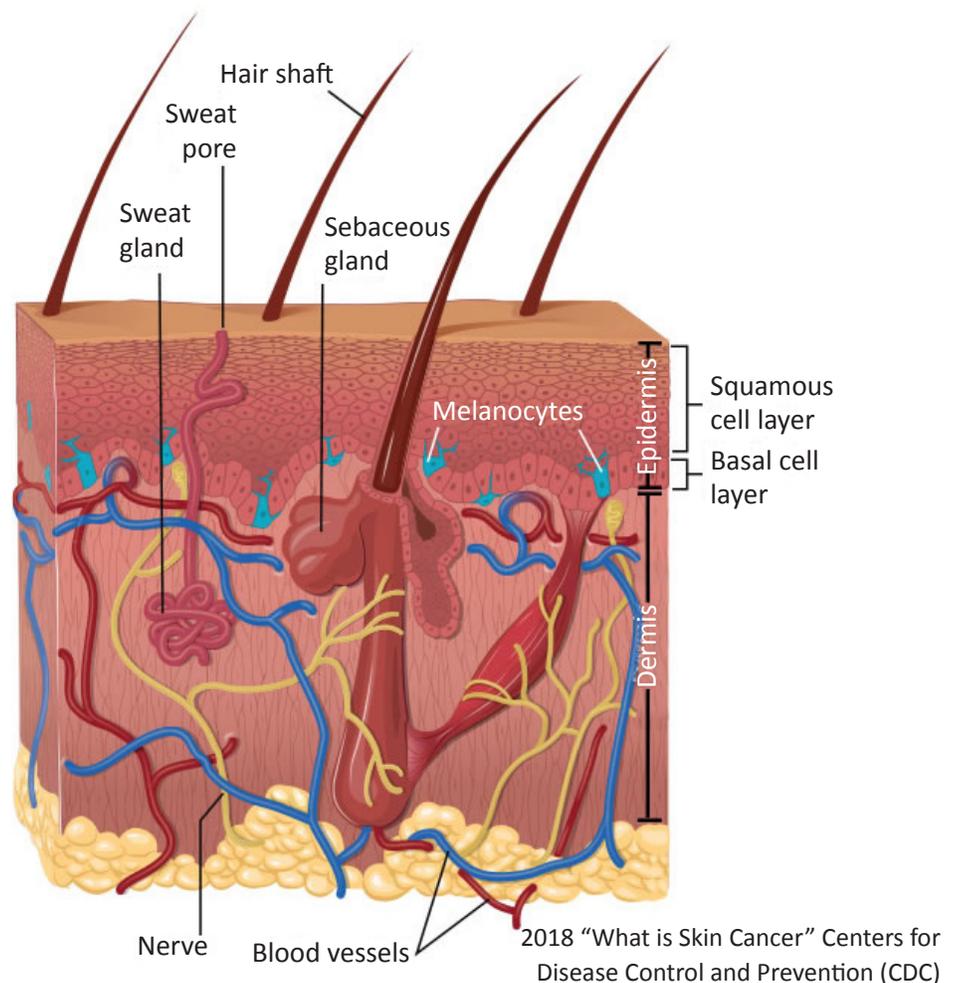


Skin Cancer

What is skin cancer?

Your skin has 3 main layers: epidermis, dermis, and a layer of fatty tissue. Skin cancer most often forms in the epidermis, the outermost layer of skin. This layer of skin is made of 3 main types of cells: squamous cells, basal cells and melanocytes.

If you have any questions, please ask your nurse or physician.



The 2 most common forms of skin cancer are squamous cell cancer and basal cell cancer.

Basal cell cancer is the most common type and is usually slow growing. This cancer rarely spreads to lymph nodes or distant organs, but can eventually enlarge and invade nearby tissues if left untreated.

Squamous cell cancer is the second most common type of skin cancer. It is more aggressive and likely to invade into the deeper layer of the skin. This type of skin cancer can also spread to nearby lymph nodes or distant organs. However, if found early, treatment is straightforward and outcomes are typically good.

What causes skin cancer?

Many risk factors can lead to skin cancer. Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun and tanning beds can damage building blocks in your skin cells, which can make them malignant (cancerous). If you have a history of having bad sunburns or using tanning beds, you are at risk.

You are also at higher risk if you have fair skin or have a family history of skin cancers. Males also have a higher risk of developing skin cancer.

Actinic keratosis is a condition of having scaly patches on your skin, typically to sun-exposed areas, that can develop into squamous cell carcinoma.

What are the symptoms?

Skin cancer will appear as a new spot on the skin that looks different than most of the other spots you have. The spot will change in size, shape, color or texture. Basal cell cancer usually forms a firm or smooth, red or pink lump. Squamous cell cancer usually forms a flat, reddish, rough or scaly patch.

How is skin cancer diagnosed?

If you are showing signs of skin cancer, it is important to get a thorough check by both a head and neck surgeon and a dermatologist (skin physician). These physicians may recommend a biopsy. A skin biopsy is a procedure in which a small piece of tissue is removed from the skin growth. This can be done in the physician's office. Another type of biopsy is a fine needle aspiration (FNA) in which tissue from neck lymph nodes is removed through a thin needle. The tissue is then examined under the microscope. An ultrasound is often used to direct the needle precisely into the nodule. An FNA is done in the physician's office.

Resources:

www.cancer.org/cancer/skin-cancer.html

For more information, please contact:

Head and Neck Multidisciplinary Clinic at Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Galter Pavilion, 675 North Saint Clair Street
Suite 15-200
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Phone: 312.695.8182
Fax: 312.695.6298

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Head and Neck Multidisciplinary Clinic