

H17 How Skin Cancer Spreads

April 2007

Intro: Cover up and use sunscreen to protect yourself from skin cancer. Sound familiar? Those words of warning should be taken seriously because a certain type of skin cancer called malignant melanoma can kill. How can a tiny mole on you shoulder or leg be so deadly? Let's go to Mayo Clinic where we'll take an animated look into the body to see how cancer spreads from a mole to other organs.

Video

Total running time 1:38

(sound bites pop up in a box within animation)

**Traci Milkanen
Had Skin Cancer**

Audio

MALIGNANT MELANOMA IS A DEADLY FORM OF SKIN CANCER. IT DEVELOPS FROM MELANOCYTES WHICH ARE PIGMENT CELLS THAT PRODUCE THE COLOR IN YOUR SKIN. THE CANCER GENERALLY STARTS AS A NEW OR IRREGULAR MOLE.

"IT LOOKED LIKE A LITTLE SPECK OF MUD OR SOMETHING. EVERYONE KEPT SAYING YOU HAVE SOMETHING ON YOUR NECK."

CANCER SURVIVOR TRACI MILKANEN [MILL-CAN'-EN]IS LUCKY, HER MELANOMA WAS

CAUGHT EARLY. IT DID NOT GO DEEP INTO HER SKIN. YOU CAN SEE HOW DOCTORS SURGICALLY REMOVE MELANOMAS AND SURROUNDING SKIN TO MAKE SURE NO CANCER CELLS ARE LEFT BEHIND.

Leslie Christenson, M.D.
Mayo Clinic Dermatologist

“IF WE CATCH IT EARLY, IT'S AN EASY TREATMENT. BUT IF WE CATCH IT LATE AND IT SPREADS TO YOUR LYMPH NODES AND OTHER ORGANS, WE JUST DON'T HAVE A TREATMENT FOR IT.”

animation continues

AT LEAST NOT YET SAYS DR. LESLIE CHRISTENSON. MALIGNANT MELANOMA IS SO DEADLY BECAUSE IT CAN SPREAD DEEP INTO THE SKIN BEYOND WHAT YOU CAN SEE. IF THIS HAPPENS THE CANCER CELLS CAN MIGRATE INTO YOUR LYMPHATIC SYSTEM WHERE VESSELS CARRY THE CELLS TO OTHER PARTS OF YOUR

BODY. HERE THE CANCER IS MOVING TO A LYMPH NODE. FROM THERE THE CELLS CAN TRAVEL TO LOCATIONS SUCH AS THE LUNG. IN ADDITION TO TRAVELING THROUGH THE LYMPH SYSTEM CANCER CAN ALSO MOVE THE SAME WAY THROUGH YOUR BLOOD STREAM.

Standup
Vivien Williams
Reporting

AND ONCE MALIGNANT MELANOMA HAS SPREAD, OR METASTASIZED, YOU ARE LIKELY BEYOND THE CHANCE OF A CURE. HOWEVER, RESEARCHERS AT MAYO CLINIC AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS CONTINUE TO SEARCH FOR WAYS TO TREAT THIS DEADLY DISEASE.

Video full

BECAUSE TRACI HAS HAD A MALIGNANT MELANOMA, SHE'S AT RISK FOR DEVELOPING ANOTHER ONE. SO SHE'S METICULOUS ABOUT SUNSCREEN, PROTECTIVE CLOTHING AND ABOUT SEEING

HER DOCTOR REGULARLY FOR
SKIN CHECKS. FOR MEDICAL
EDGE, I'M VIVIEN WILLIAMS

Anchor tag:

Staying out of the sun is the best way to protect yourself from malignant melanoma. Again, use sunscreen (spf 15 or higher), wear protective clothing and avoid being in the sun between the hours of 10 and 4.

And be sure to check your moles regularly. If you notice one that's asymmetrical, has irregular borders, has color variation, is raised or has a diameter bigger than a pencil eraser, call your doctor.

For more information on skin cancer, visit [mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com) or our Website at...

[STATIONS: Per the licensing agreement, please provide a link from your station's website to <http://www.mayoclinic.org> or voice tag "mayoclinic.org" for more information.]