

What you need to know about Moles



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Nearly everyone has a pigmented spot or mole on their skin. The majority of ordinary moles develop after birth. Some individuals are born with moles or birthmarks. Most of these are harmless and remain harmless throughout life. The chances of any one mole becoming malignant are extremely small.

DANGER SIGNS IN A MOLE

What are the signs that one of your moles could be malignant? Any changes in a mole that develops over a period of a few months as opposed to a gradual change over several years should alert you. Changes in a mole which justify a visit to the doctor are:

1. Increase in size: most moles in children enlarge gradually as the child grows. This is normal and harmless. Any significant change in size in an adult however may be important.
2. Change in outline or shape: most innocent moles are regular in outline and round or oval. Consult your doctor if the outline of a mole becomes irregular or notched or if the shape alters in any way.
3. Change in colour: a change in colour from brown to blue-black is the most common colour change in the development of a melanoma; colours within the mole can include all shades of brown, blue, black and pink. It is worth noting that innocent moles may darken during puberty and pregnancy.
4. Itching, bleeding or weeping: all these symptoms may occur in benign moles, but nevertheless should be reported to your doctor.

Any of the changes above may occur in benign moles, but are signs that the mole should be checked by your doctor.

FACTS ABOUT MALIGNANT MELANOMA

- Malignant change in a mole before puberty is extremely rare.
- Malignant melanoma is a serious form of cancer and can kill; however if it is treated early enough (usually by surgical removal) it is completely curable.
- Although the cause of malignant melanoma is not known, there is little doubt that ultraviolet light can trigger off malignant change. In particular, it is important to avoid burning your skin in the sun and to avoid excessive sun exposure.
- You are more at risk of developing a malignant melanoma if you burn easily in the sun, have blue eyes, red hair or freckles, or have several moles on your body.
- Take particular care of children's skin, as burning in the sun in early childhood may increase the risk of developing melanoma in later life.

REMEMBER – IF YOU ARE IN DOUBT ABOUT A MOLE – SEE YOUR DOCTOR

Use the Melanoma ABCDE Approach

If you notice a mole on your skin and you find it worrying, it can be helpful to think about the **ABCDE** of suspicious moles:

A – Asymmetry: Do the two halves of the mole look different? If you draw a straight line through the middle of your mole, creating two halves and the halves do not match, then the mole is asymmetrical. Keep in mind that every mole is different and can't always be perfectly symmetrical. If you do notice asymmetry, it may not be anything serious on its own but warrants extra attention.



B – Border: Borders that are poorly defined or irregular. Borders of the mole are uneven and edges are scalloped, rugged or notched.



C – Colour: Does the colour vary from one area to another in the mole? Melanomas can have shades of red, white or blue, but they are most often shades of tan and brown or black. Changes in colour, even if it is still only one colour, such as a darkening mole, could also be a melanoma symptom.



D – Diameter: Melanomas are typically bigger than a pencil eraser (about 6 mm) when diagnosed, but they can start smaller.



E – Evolving: If you notice a mole starting to evolve or if you discover a lesion is increasing in size or changing in colour, get it checked by a doctor to see if it could be the first sign of melanoma skin cancer. You should also be on the look out for any growing dome-shaped spots on your skin.

