

Skin cancer rates five times higher than in 70s

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(Medical Xpress)—The rates of people diagnosed with malignant melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer, are now five times higher than 40 years ago, according to figures announced by Cancer Research UK.

More than 13,000 people are now developing the disease every year compared with around 1,800 in 1975.

The latest [incidence rates](#) show around 17 people in every 100,000 are diagnosed with [malignant melanoma](#) in Great Britain every year. This is compared to just over 3 per 100,000 in the mid 70s.

The dramatic rise is partly down to an explosion in package holidays to Europe dating from the late 60s and the increasing popularity of the "must-have" tan often achieved only after damaging sunburn. The boom in sunbed use has also helped to fuel the increase in [skin cancer](#).

Malignant [melanoma](#) is now the fifth most common cancer in the UK and more than 2,000 people die from the disease each year.

One of the best ways for people to reduce their risk of melanoma is to avoid sunburn. Those with the highest risk of the disease include people with pale skin, lots of moles or freckles, a history of sunburn or a family history of the disease.

Nick Ormiston-Smith, head of statistics at Cancer Research UK, said: "Since the mid-1970s, malignant melanoma [incidence rates](#) in the UK have increased more rapidly than any of today's 10 most common cancers.

"Holidays in hot climates have become more affordable and sunbeds are more widely available since the 1970s. But we know overexposure to UV rays from the sun or sunbeds is the main cause of skin cancer. This means, in many cases, the disease can be prevented, and is why it's essential to get into good sun safety habits, whether at home or abroad."

"The good news for those that are diagnosed, is that survival for the disease is amongst the highest for any cancer, more than 8 in 10 people will now survive it."

Amanda Crosland, 43, from Leeds was diagnosed with malignant

melanoma in 2001. Being red-haired and fair skinned, mother-of-two Amanda has always covered up in the sun. So, when she noticed a new mole, she got it checked out straight away.

Amanda said: "When I noticed a new mole on my left calf, I knew it was safest to get it checked out by the doctor. Spotting it early meant I had a successful operation to remove the cancer before it spread.

"I've always been careful to look after my skin, but I do remember getting sunburnt as a girl. I still enjoy getting out in the sun, but now make sure the kids and I are properly protected: hats, t-shirts, and sunscreen, so we can enjoy the sun safely in the garden or at the beach. All you need is a bit of common sense!"

Cancer Research UK and NIVEA SUN are working in partnership for the third year of their campaign to encourage people to enjoy the sun safely this summer. The partnership offers simple advice that people can follow to make sure they have a great summer while protecting their skin.

Avoiding sunburn is key. Other advice includes spending time in the shade, covering up and using at least SPF15 sunscreen. The campaign will include a digital, radio and outdoor advertising campaign plus teams handing out hats and sunscreen on days when the sun is strong.

Caroline Cerny, senior health campaigns manager at Cancer Research UK, said: "Everyone loves getting out and about and enjoying the summer sun. It's essential to take care not to burn – [sunburn](#) is a clear sign that the DNA in your skin cells has been damaged and, over time, this can lead to skin cancer. When the [sun](#) is strong, pop on a t-shirt, spend some time in the shade and use a sunscreen with at least SPF15 and good UVA protection."

Better detection methods may also have contributed to increasing rates.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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