

Pensioners seven times more likely to get deadly skin cancer than 40 years ago

6 April 2015

	1975-1977	2009-2011	Percentage Change
Male	6.9	67.6	88.4
Female	8.5	45.7	436
Persons	7.9	55.2	603

To remove the effects of random variations in rates from year to year the percentage change in rates since the mid 1970s is based on European age-standardised incidence rates for 1975-1977 and 2009-2011.

People over 65 are around seven times more likely to develop malignant melanoma compared to 40 years ago, according to new figures released by Cancer Research UK today.

Older men in Great Britain are around 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with this kind of life-threatening skin cancer than their parents' generation while older women are around five times more likely to develop this disease.

The [most recent figures](#) show that on average around 5,700 pensioners are now diagnosed with melanoma each year compared with just 600 in the mid 1970s.

While age is one of the biggest risk factors for melanoma the huge increase in pensioners being diagnosed with the disease is likely to be linked to the cheap package holiday boom dating from the 1960s, and the desirability of having a tanned appearance even at the expense of painful sunburn.

Getting sunburnt just once every two years can triple your risk of developing [malignant melanoma](#) and even reddening of the skin is a sign of damage.

Sue Deans, a 69-year-old retired teacher and mother of three, was first diagnosed in 2000 with

malignant melanoma after the doctor removed a mole, and re-diagnosed in 2007 after she discovered a lump under her armpit.

"I was part of the generation where package holidays became affordable and you could go abroad nearly every year," she said. "I don't think there was much understanding at the time about the impact that too much sun can have on your risk of getting skin cancer. And I loved the sun but suffered quite a bit of sunburn over the years.

"I've always been quite body aware so my cancer was spotted early. I had successful surgery and have been healthy since – but I'm always vigilant in keeping an eye out for anything unusual or persistent that might need to be checked. Now I make sure my grandson knows the dangers of getting caught out in the sun."

Around 13,300 people are diagnosed with malignant melanoma in the UK each year making it the fifth most common cancer overall in the UK and the second most common cancer in young adults (aged 15-34). Each year 2,100 people die from the disease.

Professor Richard Marais, Cancer Research UK's skin cancer expert based in Manchester, said: "It's worrying to see melanoma rates increasing at such a fast pace, and across all age groups. It is very important for people to take care of their skin in the sun. It is also important for them to keep an eye on their skin and seek medical opinion if they see any changes to their moles, or even to normal areas of skin. Melanoma is often detected on men's backs and women's legs but can appear on any part of the body."

Cancer Research UK and NIVEA SUN are working in partnership 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.

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK's head of health information, said: "Many cases of malignant melanoma, the most serious form of [skin cancer](#), are preventable by taking precautions in the sun and making sure you don't burn.

"Sun damage accumulates over time so avoiding sunburn – and sunbeds - is key as well as getting to know your skin type so you don't overdo it on the beach or even in the garden. You can burn at home just as easily as you can on holiday, so remember to spend time in the shade, wear a T shirt and a hat to protect your skin and regularly apply sunscreen that is at least Factor 15 and has four stars. Swapping bad [sun](#) habits for good ones could save your life."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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