

Firefighters may face higher odds for skin cancer

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(HealthDay)—Exposure to firefighting chemicals may be one reason

why Florida firefighters have a higher-than-normal rate of skin cancer, a new study suggests.

The researchers analyzed data from almost 2,400 firefighters statewide who'd participated in a [cancer](#) survey. They found that 4.5 percent—109 firefighters—had been diagnosed with [skin](#) cancer. That included 17 cases of melanoma, 84 cases of other types of skin cancer and 18 of an unknown type of skin cancer.

The melanoma rate among the firefighters was 0.7 percent, compared with 0.011 percent in the general population, according to the researchers.

"We believe there are chemicals in the work environment that, when firefighters come into contact with them, might be increasing the risk for specific kinds of cancer," study leader Dr. Alberto Caban-Martinez, said in a University of Miami news release. He's with the university's Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center.

The study noted that other factors also could be involved, such as:

- Increased ultraviolet radiation exposure when firefighters respond to an emergency during daylight hours
- Improper decontamination of safety gear after an emergency call
- Exposure to diesel exhaust from fire trucks engines idling while firefighters prepared to respond to a call

A major surprise in the study was the younger ages that skin cancer occurred among the firefighters, Caban-Martinez said.

The firefighters' average age when diagnosed with skin cancer was 42 for melanoma, 38 for non-melanoma and 42 for unknown skin cancer types.

The findings were published online Dec. 13 in the journal *JAMA Dermatology*.

"If a primary care physician has a patient who is a [firefighter](#), the findings suggest that they make it a point to do a full body skin exam and provide health education on skin cancer protection," Caban-Martinez said.

He noted that some firefighters may not consider skin cancer screenings until they're older, but this study suggests it's wise to begin full body skin examinations at an earlier age.

"Firefighters are already at risk for developing and dying from other cancers, so it's not surprising to me that our research has now identified that the risk of skin cancer among firefighters is elevated, particularly within the South Florida context," said senior study author Erin Kobetz, associate director of the Sylvester Center.

"There are certain occupational-vulnerable groups, including firefighters, who may need more regular [skin cancer](#) screening or to start earlier," Kobetz added.

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more on [skin cancer](#).

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