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**MOLES AND MELANOMA IN CHILDREN AND TEENS**

**What are moles?**

“Moles” (melanocytic nevi) are common, raised or flat spots on the skin. Moles are most often tan or brown in color but can sometimes be skin-colored, pink, or even blue.

Some children are born with moles. A mole that is present at birth is called a congenital nevus.

Other moles may appear over time. It is normal for children to grow new moles as they get older. Teenagers often have 15-25 moles. Children may get more moles if other family members have many moles. Spending lots of time in the sun can also trigger more moles.

**What is a melanoma?**

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer. Melanoma is very rare in children. Melanoma is more common in adults.

Risk factors for melanoma include:

* Having lots of moles (more than 50)
* Sunburns
* Tanning bed use
* Family history

Preventing sun damage in childhood can help prevent melanoma later in life.

**How can I tell the difference between a mole and a melanoma?**

**Moles:**

* round shape
* all one color
* smooth edges
* stable in size, or growing slowly with a child

**Melanoma**

* Irregular shape
* More than one color
* More likely to bleed
* Growing quickly

A new pink or black spot, a quickly growing spot, a spot that looks different than the other moles on the body, or a mole that has recently changed should be checked by a dermatologist.

**Here are some helpful tips that can help to watch for melanoma:**

1. A mole that looks different than other moles on the body should be checked by a dermatologist.
2. In children, a melanoma can look like a growing pink or red bump that may or may not bleed.
3. Moles with any of the ABCDE changes should be checked by your doctor.

**ABCDE changes of melanoma**

**Asymmetry:** If you draw a line through the middle of a healthy mole, the two sides should match. Moles with asymmetry are more likely to have melanoma.

**Border:** The border of a melanoma tends to be uneven and hard to see.

**Color:** Moles should be one color. Melanoma is more likely to have more than one color.

**Diameter:**  Most healthy moles are small, smaller than a pencil eraser. A spot that is larger than this should be checked.

**Evolution**: Evolution means change. Changes in size, shape, color, or thickness can be a sign of melanoma.

Not all moles that have ABCDE changes will be melanoma, but moles with any of these changes should be examined.

**What can I do to protect my child’s skin and prevent melanoma?**

1. **Sun protection**.

The most important thing you can do to prevent skin cancer of all kinds is to protect from the sun. The best ways to protect from the sun are:

* Avoid sun from 10 AM to 2 PM when the sun is strongest.
* Wear protective clothing. (e.g., long sleeves, long pants, wide-brimmed hats, and sunglasses)
* Wear sunscreen that is:
  + broad spectrum (UVA and UVB coverage)
  + SPF30 or higher
  + water resistant

For more information, see SPD’s handout on Sun Protection: <https://pedsderm.net/for-patients-families/patient-handouts/#SunProtection>

1. **Keep an eye on moles for changes.**

It can be hard to memorize the way each mole looks. If you look at moles once a month, you may more easily notice changes.

* When checking your skin, make sure to look at your palms and soles and in between fingers and toes.
* Taking pictures to compare can also be helpful.

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