

Let's Talk About...

Moles and melanoma

What is a mole?

A mole is a flat spot or raised bump on the skin that contains more melanocytes, cells that make skin color (called melanin). Moles are usually tan or brown, but sometimes they are the same color as surrounding skin or even pink or blue.

Children can develop many moles until they are about 20 years old. Spending more time in the sun can also cause more moles to grow.

What are the different types of moles?

- **Acquired melanocytic (mel-AN-oh-sit-ick) nevi:** Moles that appear as your child grows.
- **Congenital melanocytic nevi:** Moles present at birth. These moles often grow as your child grows and can be small or giant (bigger than 15 inches). Melanoma (skin cancer) is more likely to grow in giant congenital melanocytic nevi, so healthcare providers should watch these moles closely.

What is a melanoma?

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that grows in the melanocytes. It can be deadly if it spreads throughout the body, so it's important to notice it early and have a healthcare provider remove it. Adults are more likely to get melanoma, but teens occasionally develop it. Children are more likely to get melanoma if they have many moles and a family history of melanoma.

What is the difference between a mole and a melanoma?

Melanoma can develop from a mole, showing up as a change in the mole's size, shape, or color. It can also grow as a new, irregular brown-black spot or pink bump.

A normal mole is usually rounder and uniform in color compared to a melanoma.

How do I know if my child has melanoma?

Remember the acronym ABCDE if you worry that a spot on your child's skin may be melanoma:

- **Asymmetry:** If you drew a line through the mole, the two halves would not match in size, shape, color, or texture.
- **Border:** A melanoma's border is often irregular or not well defined. You can usually see the border of a mole well.
- **Color:** A melanoma may have many different colors or blue, black, red, or white areas inside.
- **Diameter:** A melanoma is usually bigger than 1/4 inch, or the size of a pencil eraser. However, many normal moles are this size or can be larger.
- **Evolution:** The mole has changed in shape, size, thickness, or color. If your child has other moles, you can tell if this one looks different. Normal moles often become more elevated and squishy over time. If a mole suddenly becomes firm or begins itching, bleeding, or crusting, take your child to a healthcare provider.



