

CURTIS REID: My name is Curtis Reid, and I am a resident physician here in the Department of Dermatology at Mayo Clinic. I am the lead author on the upcoming article entitled *The Increasing Incidence of Melanoma Among Young Adults*.

Using a well defined patient population in southeast Minnesota, we found that the incidence of melanoma in young adults is increasing at an alarming rate. Since the 1970s the incidence of this disease in young adults has increased more than six-fold. The findings are most dramatic among young women, in whom the incidence has increased more than eighty-fold.

As it stands now the incidence of melanoma in young women is at about 45 cases per 100,000 patients per year. Health care providers who regularly do skin exams should be aware that melanoma is not just a disease of elderly patients with chronic sun damage. Young adults are at a very real risk of developing melanoma. Careful skin exams should be done whenever young adult patients are seen. Additionally, the threshold for biopsy for new or changing lesions should be the same in young adults as it is for older patients groups.

The medical community can use the results of this study to provide appropriate patient education for their young adult patients. And they can be taught that their risk of developing melanoma even when they're young is very real. They should be advised to practice good sun-safe behavior such as wearing sunscreen, seeking out the shade, and avoiding the sun during the midday hours. Additionally, they can be taught the signs and symptoms of melanoma and taught to look for any new or changing lesions. And they should be counseled that they should bring those lesions to the attention of their health care provider.

There have been other national database studies that have shown a similar increase in the incidence of melanoma among young adults. It would be nice to see studies similar to ours be performed in local populations in other geographic areas around the United States and around the world. Additionally, it would be interesting to see a prospective study done to try to identify the underlying factors that are associated with this increased incidence. Certainly the rising epidemic of tanning bed usage as well as cultural norms that dictate ideal skin color are probably contributing. The retrospective study that we did was not designed to look at these factors, but I hope that we can continue this line of research in the future.

The bottom line is that melanoma is becoming increasingly more common among young adults. Health care providers should use this data to ensure that appropriate screening exams are being performed, and to provide appropriate patient education to their young adult patients about the risk of developing melanoma.

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