

What you need to know about

SKIN CANCER

As letter carriers, we spend much of our time in the sun. While we try to protect ourselves from the everyday threats of sun exposure—heat and sunburn—we need to remember that our job also brings a risk of skin cancer.

Skin cancer is the abnormal growth of genetically damaged skin cells. Virtually all skin cancer is linked to sun exposure. The cellular damage doesn't always involve sunburn—some kinds of cancer are caused simply by long-term sun exposure, even when sunscreen and other sun protection are used.

The most common cancer in the United States, skin cancer affects an estimated one in five people in their lifetime. While fewer people are contracting cancer in general each year, incidents of skin cancer are on the rise, striking about 3 percent more Americans each year. The growing threat led the U.S. Surgeon General to launch a special initiative in 2014 to prevent skin cancer.

"You don't think of sunshine as a threat to your health, but this is another hazard of working as a letter

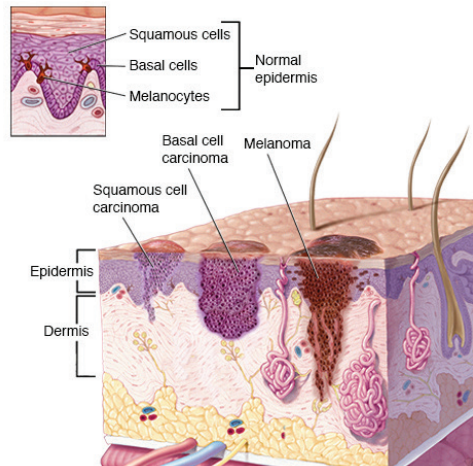
carrier," NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel Peralta said. "Every active and retired carrier, at any age, should take steps to protect themselves from the sun's rays and know the signs of skin cancer to catch it early."

Types of skin cancer

There are three common types of skin cancer, each affecting a different type of cell in the skin.

Squamous cell cancer (or "carcinoma," another word for cancerous growth) affects the outer layer of skin made up of "squamous" cells that eventually die and are shed from the body. Basal cells make up the layer below and can develop basal cell carcinoma.

Basal cell cancer accounts for about 80 percent of skin cancers in this country, and squamous cell cancer about 20 percent. Melanoma is rare, accounting for less than 1 percent of skin cancer incidents. However, melanoma kills five times more people each year—more than 10,000 people die of melanomas annually, versus about 2,000 for the other two types.





Squamous cell cancer



Basal cell cancer



Melanoma

Melanoma affects melanocytes, cells that produce a skin pigment called melanin, which is the body's natural sunscreen. Sun exposure causes these cells to produce additional melanin to protect skin layers below, causing a tan.

Skin cancer strikes men more often than women, and fair-skinned people more often than those with dark skin. On the other hand, dark skin may make it harder to notice skin cancer and get early treatment, which may explain why African-Americans are less likely to survive when they contract skin cancer.

Prevent and detect

Prevention and early detection are the keys to avoiding death by skin cancer.

Letter carriers should cover their skin with clothing and wear a broad-brimmed hat whenever possible while working in the sun.

On exposed skin, use the right sunscreen. A "broad spectrum" sunscreen blocks both kinds of ultraviolet light rays (UVA and UVB) that cause the most damage to the skin. Use a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. SPF measures how much longer the skin is safe with sunscreen protection than without it—on a day when it would take half an hour for skin to burn, SPF 15 should give you nearly eight hours of safety. Be sure to use enough sunscreen for adequate coverage of the skin. Dermatologists suggest using at least 1 ounce of sunscreen—about enough to fill a shot glass—to cover exposed areas.

Sun conditions can change and sweat can wash away sunscreen, so bring a bottle of sunscreen with you on your route to reapply it if necessary. Also, be sure your sunscreen has not expired. Check the expiration date, and if there is no date, don't use it if it is at least

three years old. If you've stored the sunscreen in a hot place, such as an LLV, it may lose effectiveness sooner.

Use sunscreen year-round, even on cloudy days. As the weather turns cooler, it may fool your skin into feeling safe, but the sun's ultraviolet radiation can still damage any exposed skin.

Keep in mind that, as someone who receives large amounts of sun exposure on the job, a letter carrier needs to be careful about exposure at the beach or the park, too. Total exposure over a lifetime is the main risk factor for skin cancer.

Know the signs

Even if you have always been careful to protect yourself on sunny days, the risk of skin cancer grows as you grow older. Most skin cancer can be treated successfully if detected early enough, so learn the signs of skin cancer.

Melanocytes, those pigment-producing cells that can develop into melanoma, also often produce harmless, non-cancerous growths we know as moles. Pigment clustered in one area is a freckle. Neither are cancerous, but they can make discerning cancerous skin growths more difficult, and a mole can later develop into a melanoma, so it is important to check your skin regularly and know what to look for.

The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends that everyone practice monthly head-to-toe self-examination of their skin. Skin cancers found and removed early are almost always curable.

Most skin cancers are either found by people checking their own skin or are noticed by a loved one. With good lighting and a full-length mirror, check your whole body. Use a hand-held mirror or ask for help to see hard-to-reach spots. Check your whole body, not just sun-



Help boost breast cancer awareness

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and you can show your support with an NALC T-shirt. This cool black T-shirt has a custom pink design that encourages everyone to "Carry on the Fight" against the second-leading cause of death among women. The back identifies the National Association of Letter Carriers, "Established 1889." The shirts come in sizes from small to 4XL and are available to order from NALC's Supply Department at NALC Headquarters by mailing your payment of \$15 per shirt to the NALC Supply Department, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144, or by calling 202-393-4695 to order by phone. There is a \$10 minimum for all credit-card orders.

The ABCDE rule for melanoma detection

A

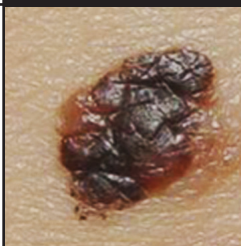
Asymmetry. Look for spots that are asymmetrical rather than round.



asymmetrical

B

Border. Look for spots with uneven borders.



uneven border

C

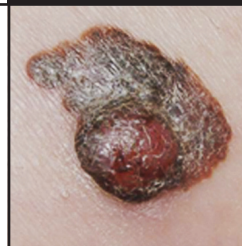
Color. Look for spots with an unusual or uneven color.



multicolor

D

Diameter. Look for spots that are larger than a quarter-inch—the width of a pencil eraser.



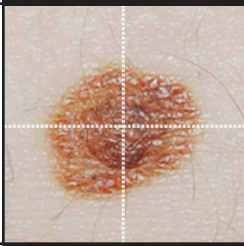
bigger than 6mm

E

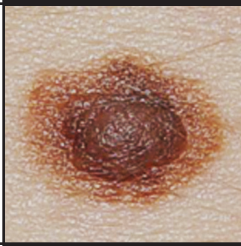
Evolving. Look for any change in a mole or other spot on the skin. Any change in size, shape, color, elevation or other trait—or any new symptom such as bleeding, itching or crusting—points to danger.



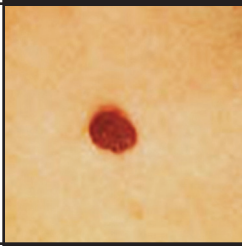
some changes



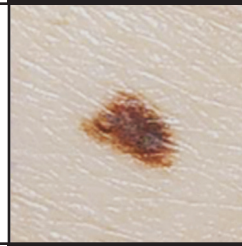
symmetrical



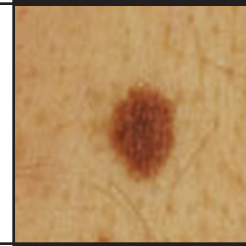
smooth border



single color



smaller than 6mm



no changes

exposed areas, including underarms, scalp, groin and the soles of your feet.

If you notice anything unusual, including any new spots or a change in the shape, color or size of a spot, visit your doctor as soon as possible.

Keep a keen eye out for melanoma, as it is the most dangerous and fastest-spreading skin cancer. It can become life-threatening in as little as six weeks and, if untreated, it can spread to other parts of the body.

Melanoma is usually flat with uneven borders and may have multiple dark colors. Use the ABCDE rule (above) to look for melanoma.

If you or someone in your family has had melanoma in the past, see a dermatologist, who is likely to recommend regular visits to monitor your skin.

Basal cell carcinomas usually appear on skin areas that get the most sun, such as the face or neck, but they can show up anywhere. Look for:

- Flat, firm, pale or yellow areas, similar to a scar
- Raised reddish patches that might be itchy
- Small, pink or red, translucent,

shiny, pearly bumps, which might have blue, brown or black areas

- Pink growths with raised edges and a lower area in their center, which might contain abnormal blood vessels spreading out like the spokes of a bicycle tire
- Open sores (which may have oozing or crusted areas) that don't heal, or that heal and then come back

Squamous cell carcinomas also tend to grow on areas that get sun, such as the face, ear, neck, lips or hands. But they can also show up anywhere. Look for:

- Rough or scaly red patches, which might crust or bleed
- Raised growths or lumps, sometimes with a lower area in the center
- Open sores (which may have oozing or crusted areas) that don't heal, or that heal and then come back
- Wart-like growths

Not all skin cancers look like these descriptions, though, so point out anything you're concerned about to your doctor.

For more information, visit the Skin Cancer Foundation website at skincancer.org. **PR**