

## Moles

Moles, or nevi, are very common. Moles are areas of the skin where there are more cells called melanocytes. Melanocytes are the cells in the body that produce pigment, or color. Moles can be many colors including skin-tone, pink, tan, brown and very dark brown to black. Moles can be raised or flat. Moles can have hair. Moles can grow on any skin surface, including the scalp, hands and feet.

When someone is born with a mole, or develops one in the first months of life, the mole is called a congenital, or birthmark mole. About 1 in 100 people are born with one or more moles. Most people develop their moles later in childhood or adulthood. These are called acquired moles. They are most common on sun exposed areas of skin such as the face, neck, upper body, arms and legs.

### Checking Moles

Most moles are harmless, but in rare cases moles may become cancerous. Checking moles and looking for changes is an important step in helping to catch worrisome changes early.

Some changes to look for are asymmetry (moles that do not look the same on each half), irregular shapes or borders, uneven color or large size. Also look for any moles that bleed, itch or become painful. Looking at your child's skin regularly can help you recognize moles that are more at risk for becoming cancerous.

Your doctor may send you to see a dermatologist (a doctor who specializes in treating skin problems) if your child's moles change or have any of the features mentioned above.

### When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor if you see any of the following changes in a mole:

- Irregular borders (uneven shape or edges)
- Changes in color to black, blue or red.
- Changes in the surface texture
- Scabs, scaling, irritation or bleeding in the mole



**Picture 1** It is important to check your child's moles regularly.

## Treatment for Moles

Often a dermatologist may be able to simply look at your child's moles and tell you if they look worrisome. If the dermatologist is not concerned about the look of your child's moles at the appointment, he or she may measure some moles and take some photos that will allow the moles to be watched for future changes.

If a mole is getting irritated frequently, bleeding, difficult to watch due to location or dark color, atypical in appearance or worrisome, the dermatologist may perform a skin biopsy. A skin biopsy is a procedure that involves removing the mole so that it can be looked at under a microscope.

There are many ways used to remove moles. The method your doctor will choose depends on the age of your child, the location of the mole, the size of the mole and the amount of concern for skin cancer. Generally, removing moles in the dermatologist's office is a simple and safe procedure that can be done with local anesthesia.

## Prevention

You can do some things to prevent moles from becoming cancerous:

- Try to keep your child out of the sun for long periods of time to avoid severe sunburns. The sun is especially dangerous between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm.
- Use a broad spectrum, water-resistant sun block lotion with an SPF of 30 or greater. A broad spectrum lotion blocks both UVA and UVB rays from the sun. Re-apply sunscreen to your child at least every 2 hours and after he swims or sweats.
- Take advantage of shade whenever possible. Have your child wear a broad-brimmed hat, sunglasses and protective clothing when outdoors.
- Do not let your child use tanning beds.
- Check the moles on your child's body, limbs and face regularly and call the doctor if you notice any changes.