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VITAL SIGNS

Patterns: Melanoma Rises Sharply in Young Women

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Over the past three decades, the incidence of [melanoma](#), the most deadly type of [skin cancer](#), has increased much more sharply in young women than in young men.

Melanoma incidence in people 15 to 39 has risen and fallen over the years since data collection began, increasing among white men to 7.7 per 100,000 in 2004 from 4.7 in 1973. But at the same time among white women, cases rose to 13.9 per 100,000 from 5.5. The trend was also evident for later-stage [tumors](#) less likely to be misdiagnosed, suggesting this is a real increase rather than simply a result of more accurate surveillance.

The report is based on data from nine [tumor](#) registries managed by the [National Cancer Institute](#) covering Atlanta, Connecticut, Detroit, Hawaii, Iowa, New Mexico, San Francisco-Oakland, Seattle and Utah. The database includes records on more than 3.5 million tumors categorized by racial group; the researchers used data only from whites.

The upsurge among young women, the [authors write](#) in this month's issue of The Journal of Investigative Dermatology, parallels reports of increased exposure to ultraviolet radiation from [sunburn](#) and the use of tanning beds.

“Since this is a [cancer](#)-register-based study, we don't have actual exposure information on the subjects we evaluated,” said Dr. Margaret A. Tucker, the study's lead author and director of the institute's human [genetics](#) program. But because “sun exposure and tanning bed use has markedly increased in adolescent girls and young women compared to adolescent boys and young men, we are concerned that this increased exposure may be related to the rising incidence of melanoma.”

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