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MOLES AND NEVI

Moles and nevi are tan or brown, raised or flat, areas of the skin. They have an increased number of *melanocytes* – the cells in the body that give the skin its color. About one percent of all newborn babies have small brown birthmarks (*congenital pigmented moles*). Most people develop their moles later in childhood or adulthood. *Giant congenital moles* (larger than 8 inches) are rare. Fewer than one in 20,000 newborn infants have them.

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED MOLES

With small and medium-sized congenital moles, the risk of change to melanoma (skin cancer) is increased. Melanoma is a dangerous cancer. The exact amount of added risk is not known. But since there have been reports of small congenital moles becoming cancerous, we may recommend that these be removed. The risk seems to become greater during puberty and beyond, so these moles can often be removed when the child is older.

Until they are removed, it's important to check congenital moles regularly at home (see *When To Call the Doctor, page 2*). Also the dermatologist (skin doctor) should check the moles once a year.

LARGE MOLES

Babies with *giant congenital moles* have an increased risk of melanoma later on. Nearly one-fifth of these giant moles become melanomas. Many will turn cancerous during the first ten years of life, so it's important to have them removed as early as possible.

A pediatric plastic surgeon can remove them when the child is 3 months old, or earlier if there are signs of melanoma. Your doctor can explain the surgical procedure. Skin grafts or "tissue expansion" are sometimes needed when large areas of skin are removed.

MELANOMA

Malignant melanoma is a type of skin cancer that can be deadly if it spreads throughout the body. It usually grows near the surface of the skin for a period of time. Then it begins to grow deeper into the skin. Once it grows deeper into the skin, there's a much greater risk that it will spread to other organs. That is why it is so important to detect and remove the melanoma before it has spread. This can result in a complete cure, but removal after the tumor has spread may not be effective.



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

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Call your dermatologist right away if you see any of these danger signs in a mole:

- Irregular borders (uneven shape or edges) of the mole that blends into normal skin.
- Changes in color to black, blue, or red areas
- Changes in the smooth surface
- Scabs, scales, irritation or bleeding in the mole.

PREVENTION

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

- Try to avoid long periods of time in the sun and severe sunburn. The sun is especially dangerous between 11:00 a.m and 3:00 p.m.
- 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.
- Take advantage of shade whenever possible. Have your child wear a broad-brimmed hat.
- Don't let your child use tanning beds.
- Be aware of the moles your child has. Check them regularly and call the dermatologist if you notice any changes.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse, or call the Dermatology Clinic at (614) 722-5675.