

Squamous Cell Skin Cancer

Squamous cell skin cancer is the second most common form of skin cancer in Canada after basal cell skin cancer.

This form of skin cancer must be treated because the lesion may continue to grow in size, damaging surrounding tissue, and may spread to other areas of the body.

What does it look like?

Squamous cell skin cancers appear as thickened, red, scaly bumps or wart-like growths. They may also look like an open sore or crusted skin. This type of skin cancer may grow quickly over a period of a few weeks. It appears on chronically sun-exposed areas such as the head and neck, arm, back of the hand and leg. Areas to be particularly careful to check for this cancer include the rim of the ear and the lip since the cancer can be more aggressive at these locations.

What causes it?

Frequent sun exposure is the leading cause of this disease. However, people whose immune systems are suppressed through taking anti-rejection drugs face a higher risk for this disease.

Who is at risk?

The same risk factors for actinic keratoses apply to squamous cell skin cancer. Individuals who have had solid tissue transplantations (for example: kidney, liver or heart) are at extreme risk to develop squamous cell skin cancer that can spread to other parts of the body with potentially fatal consequences.

How is this skin cancer treated?

The treatment of this skin cancer can be discussed with your dermatologist. It consists mainly of surgical excision but other treatments can be used.