

Aggressive skin cancer on rise in Israel, says report

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The incidence of invasive melanoma, a particularly dangerous form of skin cancer, is on the increase in Israel, the Health Ministry said in a report released in advance of skin cancer awareness week, May 19 to 24.

The report, which is based on data from 2010, shows that compared to 2009, there was a substantial increase among the country's Jewish population in this type of melanoma, which penetrates the top layers of the skin, invading other tissue. It requires more complex medical treatment than melanoma that is confined to the top skin layers.

In the course of skin cancer awareness week, skin examinations will be offered free of charge at 300 locations around the country, in an effort to detect growths early. (Details will be available at www.cancer.org.il) In 2010, a total of 207 Israelis died of melanomas, but the mortality rate from the disease has declined over the past decade from 2.4 per 100,000 people, to 2.2.

In the same year, just over 1,000 Israelis were diagnosed with invasive melanoma, including 939 Jews, 21 Arabs and 42 people from other communities. The incidence of the disease among women in 2010 was 11.2 per 100,000 people, a 21% increase from 2009. The comparable rate for men was 13.9 per 100,000, up 13% from 2009.

The increased incidence of invasive melanoma follows relative stable numbers in prior years, but is consis-

tent with an increase in the disease elsewhere around the world.

The editor of the new Health Ministry report, Dr. Lital Keinan Boker, who heads the ministry's national cancer registry, said it will require data for a longer period of time to determine the significance of the one-year increase in invasive melanoma.

"Some of the increase could be the result of increased awareness of skin disease and early diagnosis," she said.

"It is known that exposure to the sun is a risk factor, particularly at a young age, and among fair-skinned people and those with a tendency get beauty marks, and it is also known that there are genetic factors that increase the risk of developing melanoma. It's also possible that the hole in the ozone layer [above the earth] and the [resulting] drop in protection against ionizing radiation penetrating to the earth from the sun is linked to this increase."

An Israeli study that appeared in the International Journal of Cancer, based on data from army induction centers, found that the risk of melanomas among Israelis of European origin was four times that of Israelis of Asian or North African origin. Among Jews who immigrated to Israel before age 10, the incidence was nearly twice that of immigrants who arrived here after age 10. The study was based on data from more than a million Israeli men.

The Health Ministry is

considering new rules for regulating approval of sunscreen lotion including a warning label. Last year the ministry cautioned that it would only approve sunscreen that offered protection from both UVA and UVB solar radiation. Some products on the market only offer protection from UVB rays. The ministry also said it would not approve products offering less than a 30 SPF rating, a reference to the product's sun protection factor.

According to the new Health Ministry study, in 2010, a total of 368 new patients were diagnosed with localized melanomas that were detected early and had not metastasized. This actually represented a decline in numbers from 2009, when 431 patients were diagnosed. Early detection increases the chances of cure.

In 2010, 75% of patients with localized melanoma were 55 or older when diagnosed.

The incidence of localized melanoma has been stable in Israel over the past decade, the report noted, also pointing out that the Israel Cancer Association began its efforts at encouraging public awareness of the importance of early detection of skin cancer in 1992.

As of 2008, the International Agency for Research on Cancer ranked Israel 18th in the world for the incidence of invasive melanomas. At the top of the list were Australia, the Scandinavian countries, other Western European nations and the United States.