

**Introduction**

Basal cell carcinoma, or BCC, is a type of skin cancer. It involves the basal cells of the skin at the bottom of the epidermis. It is very common and accounts for the majority of skin cancers in South Africa. Most Basal Cell Carcinomas are very slow-growing and seldom spread to other parts of the body. It often starts as a small, red, shiny spot or nodule that may bleed occasionally.



[Picture Credit: Basal Cell Carcinoma Picture]

**Incidence of Basal Cell Carcinoma in South Africa**

According to the National Cancer Registry (2014) the following number of Basal Cell Carcinoma cases was histologically diagnosed in South Africa during 2014:

Group - Males 2014	Actual No of Cases	Estimated Lifetime Risk	Percentage of All Cancers
All males	9 327	1:17	25,35%
Asian males	48	1:118	5,16%
Black males	373	1:281	3,36%
Coloured males	904	1:15	21,49%
White males	8 003	1:5	38,87%

Group - Females 2014	Actual No of Cases	Estimated Lifetime Risk	Percentage of All Cancers
All females	7 034	1:32	18,61%
Asian females	46	1:198	3,89%
Black females	375	1:409	2,33%
Coloured females	726	1:29	17,73%
White females	5 888	1:7	35,84%

The frequency of histologically diagnosed cases of Basal Cell Carcinoma in South Africa for 2014 were as follows (National Cancer Registry, 2014):

Group - Males 2014	0 – 19 Years	20 – 29 Years	30 – 39 Years	40 – 49 Years	50 – 59 Years	60 – 69 Years	70 – 79 Years	80+ Years
All males	5	68	341	985	1 950	2 541	2 253	1 052
Asian males	0	2	4	10	10	12	8	2
Black males	3	6	23	35	71	95	89	46
Coloured males	1	7	30	89	199	254	218	101
White males	5	34	226	740	1 491	2 062	1 866	1 081

Group - Females 2014	0 – 19 Years	20 – 29 Years	30 – 39 Years	40 – 49 Years	50 – 59 Years	60 – 69 Years	70 – 79 Years	80+ Years
All females	7	73	301	835	1 355	1 781	1 610	972
Asian females	0	0	6	7	6	9	10	8
Black females	0	14	25	67	62	96	58	42
Coloured females	0	5	36	92	155	186	146	95
White females	7	54	234	669	1 132	1 490	1 396	827

N.B. In the event that the totals in any of the above tables do not tally, this may be the result of uncertainties as to the age, race or sex of the individual. The totals for 'all males' and 'all females', however, always reflect the correct totals.

### Symptoms of Basal Cell Carcinoma

Basal cell carcinomas usually develop on sun-exposed parts of your body, especially on the head and neck. A much smaller number occur on the trunk and legs. Basal cell carcinomas can also occur on parts of the body that are rarely exposed to sunlight. Although a general warning sign of skin cancer is a sore that won't heal or that repeatedly bleeds and scabs over, basal cell cancer may look like:



[Picture Credit: Basal Cell Carcinoma]

- A pearly white or waxy bump. In darker skinned people, this type of cancer is usually brown or black
- A flat, scaly, brown or flesh-coloured
- More rarely, a white, waxy scar

### Risk Factors for Basal Cell Carcinoma

- The following individuals are more likely to get basal cell carcinoma:
  - Having a light-coloured skin
  - Having a Freckled skin
  - Blue, green, or grey eyes
  - Blond or red hair
  - daily sun exposure (such as the sun exposure people who work outside receive)
- Overexposure to X-rays or other forms of radiation
- Having many moles
- Many severe sunburns early in life (especially before age 18)
- Long-term

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## Reducing the Risk for Basal Cell Carcinoma

While BCCs and other skin cancers are almost always curable when detected and treated early, it is best to prevent them in the first place. Make these sun safety habits part of daily health care routine:

- Stay out of direct sunlight especially between 10:00 and 15:00
- Never stay in the sun until the skin burns
- Avoidance of tanning booths
- Wearing adequate protective clothing, including a broad-brimmed hat
- Wearing UV-blocking sunglasses (minimum UV400 protection)
- Use a broad spectrum 30 to 50 SPF according to skin colour
- Apply sunscreen at least 20 minutes before going out into the sun
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours including after swimming or excessive sweating
- Keep newborns out of the sun until at least 6 months of age
- Examine the skin head-to-toe every month
- See a doctor or other qualified health professional every year for a professional skin examination
- Avoid surfaces that reflect light more, such as water, sand, concrete, and white-painted areas

## Five Warning Signs of Basal Cell Carcinoma

Frequently, two or more of features are present in one tumour. In addition, BCC sometimes resembles non-cancerous skin conditions such as psoriasis or eczema. Only a trained physician or health care professional, such as an oncology nurse or specialist in diseases of the skin, can determine for sure. If any of the warning signs are observed or some other worrisome change in the skin is noticed, one should consult a physician immediately.



A scar-like area that is white, yellow or waxy, and often has poorly defined borders; the skin itself appears shiny and taut. This warning sign may indicate the presence of an invasive BCC that is larger than it appears to be on the surface.



An open sore that bleeds, oozes, or crusts and remains open for a few weeks, only to heal up and then bleed again. A persistent, non-healing sore is a very common sign of an early BCC.



A reddish patch or irritated area, frequently occurring on the face, chest, shoulders, arms, or legs. Sometimes the patch crusts, and it may also itch. At other times, it persists with no noticeable discomfort.



A shiny bump or nodule that is pearly or translucent and is often pink, red, or white. The bump can also be tan, black, or brown, especially in dark-haired people, and can be confused with a mole.



A scar-like area that is white, yellow or waxy, and often has poorly defined borders; the skin itself appears shiny and taut. This warning sign may indicate the presence of an invasive BCC that is larger than it appears to be on the surface.

### Diagnosis of Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)

Basal Cell Carcinoma of the skin can be mistaken for other, more benign lesions. The only way to accurately diagnose basal cell carcinoma (BCC) of the skin, is with a skin biopsy.

In the event of any skin changes, one should visit a dermatologist for an accurate assessment.

### Staging of Basal Cell Carcinoma

Staging is the process of determining whether cancer has spread and, if so, how far. It is important to know the stage of the disease in order to plan treatment.

Stages are numbered in Roman numerals between 0 and IV:

- **Stage 0.** Cancer is found only in the original tumour in the skin. Stage 0 is also called carcinoma *in situ*
- **Stage I.** The tumour is 2 centimetres wide or smaller.

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- **Stage II.** The tumour is larger than 2 centimetres and may have spread from the epidermis into the dermis.
- **Stage III.** The cancer has spread to areas below the skin
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- **Stage IV.** The cancer can be any size and has spread to distant lymph nodes or

### **Treatment of Basal Cell Carcinoma**

Basal cell carcinoma very rarely spreads to other parts of the body, although it can grow into nearby tissues if not treated. Choice of treatment depends on factors such as the tumour size and location, the patient's age, general health, and preferences.

Treatment may include one or more of the following:

- Curettage and Electrodesiccation
- Simple Excision
- Mohs' surgery
- Radiation Therapy Immune Response Modifiers, Photodynamic Therapy, or Topical
- Targeted Therapy for Advanced Basal Cell

### **Complications of Basal Cell Carcinoma**

Complications of basal cell carcinoma may include:

- A risk of
- An increased risk of other types of skin
- Cancer that spreads beyond the

### **Medical Disclaimer**

This Fact Sheet is intended to provide general information only and, as such, should not be considered as a substitute for advice, medically or otherwise, covering any specific situation. Users should seek appropriate advice before taking or refraining from taking any action in reliance on any information contained in this Fact Sheet. So far as permissible by law, the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) does not accept any liability to any person (or his/her dependants/estate/heirs) relating to the use of any information contained in this Fact Sheet.

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