

MERKEL CELL CARCINOMA

Symptoms

Merkel cell carcinoma commonly appears as painless pink, red or purple bumps on the skin. They usually appear on areas of skin exposed to the sun, such as the face, neck, arms, and legs, but they can occur anywhere on the body. Sometimes the skin on the top of the tumour might break open and bleed.^{1,2}

Key Risk Factors³⁻⁵

- Exposure to a lot of natural or artificial sunlight
- A weakened immune system due to diseases, such as HIV or chronic lymphocytic leukemia
- Taking medication that suppresses the immune system (e.g., after an organ transplant)
- A history of other types of cancer Older age (≥ 50 years)
- Male
- Fair skin
- Infection with the Merkel cell polyomavirus, present in approximately 80% of MCC tumours

What is Merkel Cell Carcinoma?

Merkel cell carcinoma (MCC) is a rare and aggressive form of skin cancer.⁶ In MCC, malignant cells form in the top layer of the skin, close to the nerve endings that sense touch.³ Once the cancer starts to metastasize, or spread, to other parts of the body, it becomes metastatic MCC.³

Diagnosis and Prognosis

MCC is often misdiagnosed as other skin cancers and grows at an exponential rate on chronically sun-damaged skin.⁷⁻¹⁰ The prognosis for MCC is poor and worsens as the tumour metastasizes.^{11,12}

Fewer than 50% of metastatic MCC patients will survive more than one year.¹²

Fewer than 20% of metastatic MCC patients will survive beyond five years¹²

Incidence

It is estimated there are 287 people in Canada with MCC*.^{13,14}

Overall, metastatic disease is found in of patients 5-12% with MCC.^{12, 13, 15, 16}

**Based on estimated U.S. incidence rates and a Canadian population of 36.26 million*



References

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