

Understanding the Differences Between Skin Cancers

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Australia — and Queensland sadly holds the title of skin cancer capital of the world. While many people use the term “skin cancer” broadly, there are actually several different types, each with their own behaviours, risks, and treatments.

Knowing the differences could save your life. Here’s what you need to know.

Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)

The most common skin cancer, BCC starts in the skin’s lowest layer — the basal cells.

What it looks like: Pearly lump, red patch, or a sore that doesn’t heal.

Why it matters: Rarely spreads but can cause serious local damage if untreated.

Treatment: Surgery, creams, freezing, or light therapy.

Key takeaway: Not usually life-threatening, but early treatment prevents scarring and tissue damage.

Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)

The second most common skin cancer, SCC develops in the squamous cells of the skin’s upper layer.

What it looks like: Scaly patch, thickened skin, or a sore that bleeds or crusts.

Why it matters: Grows faster than BCC and can spread to lymph nodes.

Treatment: Usually surgery, sometimes additional therapy.

Key takeaway: More dangerous than BCC — should never be ignored.

Melanoma

The most serious type of skin cancer.

What it looks like: New mole or existing mole that changes in size, shape, or colour.

Follows the ABCDE rule: Asymmetry, Border irregularity, Colour variation, Diameter >6mm, Evolving.

Why it matters: Aggressive and can spread quickly through the body.

Treatment: Surgery, immunotherapy, targeted therapy.

Key takeaway: Causes most skin cancer deaths, but survival is 94% if caught early.

Skin Cancer Types at a Glance

Type	What It Looks Like	Growth Speed	Risks	Treatment
Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC)	Pearly bump, red patch, sore	Slow growing	Rarely spreads, but can damage local tissue	Surgery, creams, freezing, light therapy
Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC)	Scaly patch, thickened skin, sore	Faster growing	Can spread to lymph nodes if ignored	Surgery, additional therapy
Melanoma	New or changing mole (ABCDE)	Aggressive, spreads quickly	Most dangerous, life-threatening	Surgery, immunotherapy, targeted therapies

Quick Facts

- 2 in 3 Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer in their lifetime.
- Melanoma causes most skin cancer deaths — but survival is 94% if caught early.
- Regular skin checks can save lives.

Final Word

Skin cancers are not all the same — some grow slowly, others can be deadly in months. The good news? Most skin cancers are treatable if detected early.

At **Skin Check Australia**, we provide comprehensive care:

- ✓ Qualified dermoscopists
- ✓ Experienced skin cancer doctors
- ✓ Advanced dermoscopy & digital imaging
- ✓ Removal of suspicious and benign lesions

👉 [Book your skin check today](#) and protect your skin.