Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States. Anyone can get skin cancer, regardless of skin color and it is estimated that one in five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. According to the American Cancer Society, more skin cancers are diagnosed in the US each year than all other cancers combined. There are several different types of skin cancer, melanoma being the most serious kind.

Most skin cancers are caused by too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays. Most of this exposure comes from the sun, but some may come from man-made sources, such as indoor tanning beds and sun lamps. According to the MN Department of Health, since 1988 the incidence rates of melanoma have doubled in Minnesota for both males and females. Melanoma has been identified as one of the most rapidly increasing cancers among men and women. In 2014, a new law was enacted in Minnesota that prohibits people under age 18 from using UV-light tanning devices. UV light exposure is the leading cause of melanoma, along with sunburn, skin type and family history.

The good news is, when caught early, skin cancer is highly treatable. Research shows catching melanoma in its earliest stages is one of the most important factors in improving the outcomes of a melanoma diagnosis and can often be treated with simple surgery. In its later stages, when it spreads to other body organs, melanoma can be deadly. There are several things you can do to protect yourself from UV rays, and increase your chance of catching melanoma early by carefully examining your skin once a month and visiting a dermatologist once a year.

**SCREENING TIPS**

Skin cancer can be detected early by following the Academy of Dermatology’s recommended tips for checking your skin.

- Examine your body front and back in the mirror, then look at the right and left sides with your arms raised. Bend elbows and look carefully at forearms, underarms, and palms.
- Look at the backs of your legs and feet, the spaces between your toes, and the soles of your feet.
- Examine the back of your neck and scalp with a hand mirror. Part hair for a closer look.
- Check your back and buttocks with a hand mirror.

In 2016, there were 374 cases of melanoma diagnosed and treated at Abbott Northwestern Hospital, making it the second highest incident rate of cancer at Abbott Northwestern. Because of this, and the growing numbers of those diagnosed with melanoma in Minnesota, the Abbott Northwestern Hospital Cancer Committee discussed at their June 2017 meeting that this year’s screening initiative would be focused on skin cancer.
SKIN CANCER SCREENING EVENT

The Virginia Piper Cancer Institute – Abbott Northwestern Hospital, part of Allina Health, partnered with two of the system’s primary care dermatology providers to offer a free skin cancer screening event on Friday, Sept. 15, 2017 at Abbott Northwestern – WestHealth. There were 27 participants and each had a full-body skin check with a dermatology provider. They also had the opportunity before or after their screening to meet with a melanoma cancer care coordinator, who is a registered nurse, and an oncology surgeon to discuss melanoma risk factors, how it is treated if found and screening guidelines. Participants were given a copy of their screening form that was completed by the provider, including recommendations for any follow up.

**Screening participant results**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of participants screened</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of participants recommended for a full dermatology consultation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of participants recommended for dermatology consultation and biopsy</td>
<td>6</td>
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The Virginia Piper Cancer Institute Research Program at Abbott Northwestern Hospital offers several different clinical trials for melanoma patients. In 2016, 27 patients with metastatic melanoma were enrolled in a clinical trial and as of November 2017, 22 patients were enrolled. The Institute is also in the process of establishing a Melanoma Program at Abbott Northwestern.