

Congenital Moles

What are congenital moles?

Congenital moles (melanocytic nevi) are brown birthmarks that about 1% of babies are born with. “Congenital” means something that a person is born with. These moles are classified based on their size when people are adults:

- Small moles: less than 1.5 centimeters (cm)
- Medium moles: 1.5 to 19.9 cm
- Large moles: 20 cm or more

As your child grows, their moles will grow larger at about the same rate. Your child’s healthcare team will decide if your child’s mole is small, medium or large by estimating how large it will be when your child is older.

Should small or medium moles be treated?

For small and medium-sized moles, the risk of developing skin cancer (melanoma) is not clear. The risk may not be greater than the risk for other moles that people get later in life. Sometimes we advise having a small or medium-sized mole removed for these reasons:

- It is changing
 - It is in a place that is hard to see
 - It has an abnormal (atypical) appearance
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Should large moles be treated?

Large congenital moles have a greater risk of developing melanoma. Some of these melanomas happen during the first 5 years of life. We may consider removing the mole, but not all large moles can be removed. If your child’s mole is on their head, neck, back, or if they also have many smaller moles, they may need an MRI to see if their brain or spine is affected.

What should I do to take care of my child’s moles?

We recommend that your child see a doctor to have the mole examined at least once a year. They may take photos of your child’s mole at each visit to see if the mole changes over time. It is also important to check your child’s congenital mole about once a month at home. When you check your child’s moles you will need to look for any changes that could be a sign of melanoma. Things to look for include:

- Changes in the border of the mole
- Changes in color or shape of the mole
- Changes in the surface of the mole
- Rapid growth of the mole
- Development of a bump or lump within the mole
- Bleeding, pain, or area of the mole that is not healing

Call your child’s doctor if you see any of these changes.

To Learn More

- Dermatology
206-987-2158
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Sun safety

Because children with congenital moles may have a higher risk of melanoma, it is important to be extra careful in the sun. Childhood sunburns are also a risk factor for melanoma, so it is important to prevent your child from ever getting a sunburn.

See our handout “Sun Safety” seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE597.pdf.