



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**VA Boston Healthcare System**



## **Media Advisory**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Veteran Demographics, Risk Factors and Incidence of Melanoma**

BOSTON – A recent study “Demographics, Risk Factors and Incidence of Melanoma in Patients in the New England VA Healthcare system” looks at melanoma occurrence in New England Veterans. The study determined that compared to the general population, New England Veterans have a lower incident of melanoma, although the detected melanoma is often more invasive.

The study shows Veterans are inherently at greater risk based on advanced age and demographic factors. Melanomas in this population tend to be more invasive or severe, reinforcing the importance of sun protection education and screening to improve outcomes.

Additional goals of the study are to calculate the risk/susceptibility of Veterans so that quality of care and outcomes can be improved for New England Veterans.

One of the reasons why Veterans in the North East have a lower incidence of melanoma is the UV index in New England. The UV index of New England, which is positively associated with melanomas in older males, is amongst the lowest in the United States. New England has experienced a decrease in incidence and death from melanoma between 2003-2013; a trend attributed to public information programs focusing on public melanoma-awareness education.

“Although our results showed a decreased incidence and mortality from melanoma, further study is necessary to test the veracity of our findings and it would be beneficial to study/compare Veterans from other geographic regions” said Meera Mahalingam, MD, PhD, FRCPath, Lead author of the study, and Section Chief of Dermatopathology in VA New England.

Veterans older than 65 are at increased risk of having melanoma spread and when found on the body or trunk, they can often go undetected. Most patients with melanoma were white males, 54% were over 70 years old and 56% of lesions were found on the trunk. It was also found that death in Veterans associated with the study almost doubled compared to the general population, this is due in part to the prevalence of multiple comorbidities in Veterans compared to non-Veterans which leads to a lowered life expectancy.

Full study: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30395278>

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