

Former Miss Universe Dayanara Torres Has Melanoma That Spread From a Spot She 'Never Paid Attention To'

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Former Miss Universe Dayanara Torres recently shared scary news with her fans on Instagram: She's being treated for melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer.

Torres talked about the news in Spanish in the video post, but also wrote about her experience in English in the caption. "Today I have some sad news... I have been diagnosed with skin cancer 'melanoma' from a big spot/mole I never paid attention to, even though it was new, it had been growing for years & had an uneven surface," she wrote.

Torres wrote that her fiancé "had been begging me to have it checked" and finally even made a doctor's appointment for her. She had the spot biopsied and had a second surgery last week. "The results unfortunately are positive," she said. "Now we are waiting to see which treatment I will be receiving but they have already removed a big area from the back of my knee & also they have removed 2 lymph nodes at the top of my leg where it had already spread. Hoping it has not spread to any more areas or organs."

Torres said she "had no idea skin cancer could spread anywhere else in your body" and urged others to get anything unusual on their bodies checked out.

Melanoma may show up on your body in a few different ways.

It might be a change to a mole you've had for a while, a new spot or patch on your skin, a spot that looks like a changing freckle or age spot, a dark streak under your fingernail or toenail, or a slowly growing patch of thick skin that looks like a scale, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). For most people, the only sign of melanoma is a change to their skin, but melanomas can also cause itching, pain, and bleeding, the AAD says.

"New spots are particularly worrisome," Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, tells SELF. "Although many new growths are benign, some may be atypical and even cancerous."

That's why the AAD recommends that people perform regular skin checks to look for the ABCDEs of melanoma. Those include:

- **Asymmetry**
- An uneven **border**
- A variety of **colors** in the mole
- A **diameter** larger than the size of a pencil eraser
- A mole that is **evolving** in size

If you have a suspicious-looking spot on your skin, your doctor should do an exam to take a closer look. That usually involves a device called a dermoscope, which shines light on the skin and magnifies it, the AAD says. If they think the spot may be melanoma, they'll take a biopsy (which involves removing all or part of the spot) and send it off to a lab to be tested.

Treatment from there depends on your lab results, Dr. Goldenberg says. But, if you have melanoma, you'll likely be referred to a surgical oncologist.

Melanoma is treatable, but it can also spread to other parts of your body if it goes untreated.

If the melanoma isn't deep and the biopsy shows that it's confined to the skin (meaning it's stage zero, I, or II), your doctor should be able to get it all by surgically removing it, Dr. Goldenberg says. But if it's stage III or IV, it has spread to a nearby lymph node, skin, or internal organ, the AAD says.

When melanoma spreads, it usually goes to the closest lymph nodes first, the AAD says. If you have an increased risk for your melanoma to spread (e.g. it's deeper, has cells that are dividing, or broke open to resemble a sore), your doctor may recommend a surgery known as a sentinel lymph node biopsy, which can reveal whether or not the melanoma has spread there. This procedure involves injecting blue dye or a radioactive solution (or both) near the spot and then removing the sentinel nodes (the first few lymph nodes where a cancer usually spreads) while you're under general anesthesia.

Once melanoma hits your bloodstream (the next step after it invades your lymph nodes), it can go anywhere, Sapna Patel, M.D., an associate professor in the Department of Melanoma Medical Oncology at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, tells SELF. "Melanoma does not discriminate when it comes to where it can spread," she says. "We have found it in the lungs, liver, kidneys, heart, brain, and inside the eyeballs." Imaging tests such as X-rays

and CT scans can help your doctor determine where the melanoma has spread beyond the lymph nodes, the AAD says.

If your melanoma has spread, you'll be referred to an oncologist for treatment. That may include biological therapy (which aids your immune system) or targeted therapy (which uses medications to target certain vulnerabilities in cancer cells), the Mayo Clinic says. Your doctor may also recommend radiation therapy to target particular areas of your body or chemotherapy, the Mayo Clinic says. But Dr. Patel says that biological and targeted therapies have become the go-to treatments for melanomas over the past few years.

Overall, experts stress that melanoma is serious, so you shouldn't write off suspicious-looking spots. "Melanoma is the most aggressive solid cancer, millimeter for millimeter," Dr. Patel says. "It's very important that you get your skin checked regularly."