

Scientists find genes that double skin cancer risk

Scientists have discovered two new genes that double a person's chances of developing melanoma -- the deadliest form of skin cancer.

As part of an international study, a team at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR), led by Nick Hayward and Grant Montgomery, studied the genes of almost 6,000 people together with their mole count.

Specific changes in two genes were found to make people more susceptible to developing moles. The researchers went on to show, in another 4,000 people, the same two genes increased the risk of developing melanoma.

'These are the first genes found to increase melanoma risk by influencing the number of moles a person has,' explained Hayward.

'This finding improves our understanding of the genetics of melanoma and therefore the molecular pathways that lead to its development. It has long been known that having a large number of moles is the biggest risk factor,' he added.

'Therefore we predicted we would find genes linking moles and melanoma. We now have conclusive genetic evidence that having a large number of moles increases an individual's risk of developing melanoma,' said Hayward.

The study found that people who carry one of these two gene variants have a 25 percent increased chance of developing melanoma, while for individuals carrying both variants their risk is doubled, said a QIMR release.

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