What is melanoma?
Melanoma is a skin cancer that begins in melanocytes, cells that give color to skin and other tissues. Most often, melanoma begins in a mole on the skin, but it can also develop in other areas such as the eye.

Doctors rate a cancer’s severity by stages after making a diagnosis. Staging helps the doctor plan the best treatment for you. Stages for melanoma run from stage 0 to stage IV. The higher the stage of the cancer, the more severe the disease.

What is stage III?
Stage III means the cancer cells have spread to nearby lymph nodes but not to other areas of your body. The tumor may be any thickness and may or may not have a break in the skin (called ulceration). One or more of the following is true for a stage III melanoma:

• Cancer has spread to one or more lymph nodes.
• Lymph nodes may be joined together (matted).
• Cancer may be in the lymph vessels between the original tumor and nearby lymph nodes.
• Very small tumors may be found on or under the skin, not more than 2 centimeters away from where the cancer first started.

What is stage IV?
Stage IV melanoma means the cancer cells have spread from the original location to areas of the body other than the nearby lymph nodes. This is also called metastatic melanoma.

Because some cancer cells have spread and may not be removable with surgery alone, doctors use other treatments for stage III and IV melanoma.
What are the treatments for stage III melanoma?

**Wide excision** – In this surgery, the tumor and the rim of healthy skin around it is removed. After surgery, you may need skin grafting if a large amount of tissue is removed.

**Therapeutic lymph node dissection (TLND)** – This procedure involves removal of nearby lymph nodes around the cancerous lymph nodes. This helps prevent the cancer from spreading to other parts of the lymphatic system.

**Immunotherapy** – This therapy works with the body’s immune system to fight melanoma. Interferon is a common immunotherapy used for stage III cancers.

**Clinical trials** – These studies discover and evaluate new and improved cancer treatments. Talk with your doctor if you are interested in participating in a clinical trial or have questions about research studies.

What are the treatments for stage IV melanoma?

**Immunotherapy** – This therapy works with the body’s immune system to fight melanoma. Interleukin-2 and ipilimumab are examples of immunotherapies used for stage IV melanoma.

**Chemotherapy** – Drugs kill cancer cells and prevent them from spreading to other areas of the body.

**Targeted therapy** – These are drugs or other substances that block the growth and spread of cancer by interfering with the molecules involved in tumor growth and progression.

**Clinical trials** – These studies discover and evaluate new and improved cancer treatments. Talk with your doctor if you are interested in participating in a clinical trial or have questions about research studies.

**Palliative therapies** – Used to relieve symptoms and improve quality of life, these therapies include surgery to remove lymph nodes or tumors and radiation therapy to the brain, spinal cord, or bone.

What can I expect after treatment?

**Regular visits to your doctor** – Melanoma patients are at high risk of the cancer coming back. Patients should follow up with their doctor every three months for the first year after surgery and every six months for two to five years after. After that, your doctor may recommend a follow-up exam every year.

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**Helpful Resources**

**The Tom C. Mathews Jr. Familial Melanoma Research Clinic at HCI**
801-585-0595 or 1-866-378-4840 toll free
Our researchers study melanoma patterns in families to discover better ways to detect and treat the disease.

**The G. Mitchell Morris Cancer Learning Center**
6th floor of HCI’s cancer hospital
801-581-6365 or 1-888-424-2100 toll free
This is a free cancer resource library. Cancer information specialists can answer your questions and locate helpful information.

**Facial Prosthetics Services**
801-585-0140
Facial Prosthetics Services creates ears, eyes, noses, and other parts of the face for people affected by cancer.

**Patient and Family Support Services**
801-585-9755
Patient and Family Support staff help patients and their loved ones find counseling and other resources that can reduce the distress associated with cancer.