

What is penile cancer?

Penile cancer can occur on the foreskin, the glans (head) or shaft of the penis.

There are a few different types of cancer that can affect the penis, which may need [different treatments](#).

Penile cancer is diagnosed in [1 in 125,000 Australian men](#) each year. Most cases (more than 95%) are squamous cell carcinomas (a type of skin cancer that affects the outer layer of the skin (the epidermis), which can be easily cured if caught early.

Most cases of penile cancer occur in [older males](#).

Symptoms of penile cancer

Signs of penile cancer can include:

- A lump or sore on the foreskin, glans or shaft of the penis that doesn't go away after two weeks
- Bleeding from the penis or under the foreskin
- A smelly discharge or hard lump under the foreskin
- Changes in the colour or thickness of the skin of the penis or foreskin
- Pain or swelling of the glans of the penis
- Pain in the shaft of the penis.

Causes of penile cancer

Abnormal development of cells in the foreskin, glans or shaft of the penis can form a cancerous tumour that can spread to other parts of the body.

The cause of penile cancer in individual men is [often unknown](#), but some things are known to increase the risk of penile cancer, including:

- [Phimosis](#)
- Long-term [balanoposthitis](#)
- [Poor hygiene](#)
- Number of sexual partners
- Smoking
- Ultraviolet (UV) light exposure.

Diagnosis of penile cancer

Your doctor will ask you some questions, perform an examination and refer you for some tests to diagnose penile cancer. You might need a [blood test, collection of a tissue sample \(biopsy\) or scan](#).

Treatment of penile cancer

If you're diagnosed with penile cancer, your doctor will refer you to a urologist as a first step.

[Surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy](#) may be used to treat penile cancer, depending on the type and stage of the cancer.

Prevention of penile cancer

You can [prevent your risk](#) of penile cancer by:

- Practising good personal hygiene
- Getting vaccinated against human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Not smoking
- Avoiding UV exposure
- Getting treatment for inflammation that affects the genitals.

Circumcision in childhood or adolescence may reduce the risk of penile cancer by preventing foreskin problems that can occur if you don't [practise good hygiene](#).

Health effects of penile cancer

Eight out of every 10 cases of penile cancer are curable but there may be long-term effects on [quality of life and sexual function](#).

What to do about penile cancer

If you notice any changes to the skin of your penis or experience any penile pain, you should see your doctor. The sooner you seek help, the earlier you can be diagnosed and start treatment.

What questions should I ask my doctor about penis cancer?

- What type of penile cancer do I have?
- How far has the cancer spread?
- What are the treatment options, and which do you think might be best for me?
- What are the side effects and long-term consequences of treatment?
- What can I do to achieve the best possible outcome of treatment?
- How will I know if the cancer comes back?

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