

# Can Melanoma wait for the End of the COVID-19 Pandemic?

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*O Melanoma pode esperar o Fim da Pandemia da Covid-19?*

*¿Puede el Melanoma esperar el Fin de la Pandemia de la Covid-19?*

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Coronavirus 2019 disease (coronavirus disease 2019 - COVID-19) and social isolation guidelines promoted a drastic reduction of the demand for dermatological evaluation and surgeries, essential for early detection and prognosis of melanoma. **Objective:** To evaluate the reduced number of diagnoses and consultation of patients with melanoma resulting from COVID-19 between March 20 and June 30, 2019 and correlate with data collected between March 20 and June 30, 2020. **Method:** Retrospective, review study of medical charts of patients diagnosed with melanoma. It is a partial result obtained from a study that investigated the global impact of the pandemic in the dermatology outpatient clinic and residency. **Results:** In the period analyzed, a reduction of 94.1% of the consultation of patients with melanoma skin cancer was found. Neglecting melanoma during the pandemic can result in increased mortality and morbidity, in addition to higher healthcare costs. **Conclusion:** It is important that public and private services adjust to the restrictions in-force and considering the current scenario, efforts to facilitate the controlled access to the dermatologist must be made because it could avoid delays that can lead to worse prognosis.

**Key words:** Melanoma; Skin Neoplasms; COVID-19; SARS-CoV-2; Pandemics.

## RESUMO

**Introdução:** A doença pelo coronavírus 2019 (*coronavirus disease 2019* - Covid-19) e as orientações de isolamento social promoveram uma drástica diminuição da procura pela avaliação dermatológica e cirurgias, fundamentais para a detecção precoce e prognóstico do melanoma.

**Objetivo:** Avaliar a redução no diagnóstico e atendimento de pacientes com melanoma decorrentes da covid-19 entre 20 de março a 30 de junho de 2019 e correlacionar com os dados adquiridos entre 20 de março a 30 de junho de 2020. **Método:** Estudo retrospectivo de revisão de prontuários de pacientes com diagnóstico de melanoma. Trata-se de resultado parcial obtido de um trabalho que investigou o impacto global da pandemia no ambulatório e residência de dermatologia. **Resultados:** No período analisado, houve uma redução de 94,1% nos atendimentos de pacientes com câncer de pele melanoma. Negligenciar o melanoma durante a pandemia pode resultar em aumento da mortalidade e morbidade, além de maiores custos de saúde. **Conclusão:** É importante que os serviços públicos e privados se adequem às limitações do momento e, considerando a situação atual, esforços devem ser feitos para facilitar o acesso controlado ao dermatologista, pois isso evitará atrasos que resultem em pior prognóstico.

**Palavras-chave:** Melanoma; Neoplasias Cutâneas; COVID-19; SARS-CoV-2; Pandemias.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** La enfermedad del coronavirus 2019 (enfermedad del coronavirus 2019 - covid-19) y las pautas de aislamiento social promovieron una reducción drástica de la demanda, a través de la evaluación dermatológica y las cirugías, esenciales para la detección temprana y el pronóstico del melanoma. **Objetivo:** Evaluar la reducción en el diagnóstico y atención de pacientes con melanoma por covid-19 entre el 20 de marzo y el 30 de junio de 2019 y correlacionar con los datos adquiridos entre el 20 de marzo y el 30 de junio de 2020. **Método:** Estudio retrospectivo de revisión de historias clínicas de los pacientes diagnosticados de melanoma. Este es un resultado parcial obtenido de un estudio que investigó el impacto global de la pandemia en la clínica y residencia de dermatología. **Resultados:** En el período analizado, hubo una reducción del 94,1% en pacientes con cáncer de piel tipo melanoma. Descuidar el melanoma durante una pandemia puede resultar en una mayor mortalidad y morbilidad, así como en mayores costos de atención médica. **Conclusión:** Es importante que los servicios públicos y privados se adecúen a las limitaciones del momento y considerando la situación actual, esfuerzos deben ser hechos para facilitar el acceso controlado al dermatologista para evitar retrasos que pueden llevar a peores pronósticos.

**Palabras clave:** Melanoma; Neoplasias Cutáneas; COVID-19; SARS-CoV-2; Pandemias.

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## INTRODUCTION

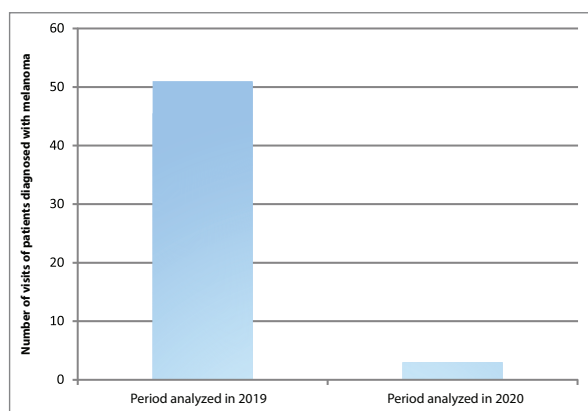
The coronavirus 2019 disease – COVID-19 and the guidelines of social isolation implemented compelled the health systems to adjust to a new reality by reorganizing the medical consultations, postponing, and cancelling outpatient visits and surgeries<sup>1,2</sup>. As result of the public decisions, there was a drastic reduction of dermatological evaluations and surgeries, essential for early detection and prognosis of melanoma<sup>3</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic, consequently, strongly impacted the dermatology services, most of all, the diagnosis of this neoplasm.

## METHOD

Patients' charts diagnosed with melanoma confirmed by anatomopathological test consulted at the dermatology outpatient of a tertiary philanthropist hospital in Espírito Santo were reviewed. It is a partial result of a study investigating the global impact of the pandemic in dermatology outpatient and residency<sup>4</sup>. It evaluated the diagnosis of affection between March 20 and June 30, 2019 and correlated with data obtained between March 20 and June 30, 2020. The difference between the proportions was calculated by Test G (non-parametric) with Yates correction. The comparisons were considered significant when  $p < 0.05$ . The data were analyzed with software BioEstat version 5.3.

## RESULTS

In 2019, 51 patients were consulted because of the diagnostic of melanoma. In 2020, however, because medical visits were restricted, only three cases were diagnosed as shown in Figure 1. There was a reduction of 94.1% between 2019 and 2020 in the consultations of patients with melanoma skin cancer.



**Figure 1.** Comparison between the absolute number of consultations from March 20 to June 30, 2019 and from March 20 to June 30, 2020.

## DISCUSSION

Neglecting melanoma during the pandemic can result in increased mortality and morbidity, in addition to high healthcare costs<sup>5</sup>. In a recent study, Degeling et al.<sup>6</sup> evaluated the progression of certain neoplasms due to delayed diagnosis during the pandemic and the economic impacts of the diagnosis and late treatment. In this article, the odds of tumor progression of melanoma because of a three-to-six months delay were 32.0% and 64.0%, respectively, demonstrating a very fast evolution of this neoplasm. Furthermore, there was an important reduction of 5-year survival resulting from diagnosis delay, melanoma was the neoplasm with greatest impact in survival. This study has also demonstrated that healthcare costs to treat melanoma, based in shift stage by progression of the disease, increased substantially resulting from pandemic imposed diagnosis delay<sup>6</sup>. Considering the expressive impact on the diagnosis of melanoma in the period analyzed, it is necessary to investigate the impact this delay can cause on the prognosis of the patients affected.

## CONCLUSION

Public and private services need to adjust to the temporary restrictions and considering the present scenario, efforts should be made to facilitate the controlled access to the dermatologist because this will avoid delays possibly resulting in worse prognosis. Pandemic will go away, but melanoma does not wait and the cost of this indiscriminate delay over oncologic treatment can be too high.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

Marina Vieira Rodrigues de Queiroz contributed substantially for the study conception/design, collection, analysis and/or interpretation of the data, wording, and critical review. Ana Carolina Tardin Rodrigues de Medeiros and Karla Spelta contributed for the wording and critical review. Carolina Oliveira Felipe and Karina Demoner de Abreu Sarmenghi contributed substantially for the study conception/design, collection, analysis and/or interpretation of the data. All the authors approved the final version to be published.

## DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There is no conflict of interests to declare.

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