

Research Shows Popularity of Indoor Tanning Contributes to Increased Incidence of Skin Cancer

According to a 2005 survey conducted by the American Academy of Dermatology, 92 percent of the respondents understood that getting a tan from the sun is dangerous. Yet, 65 percent said that they think they look better when they have a tan.

In a quest to get a “sunless” tan, almost 30 million Americans visit indoor tanning salons each year. On an average day, more than 1 million Americans visit tanning salons. Of these, 70 percent are Caucasian girls and women between the ages of 16 and 49. More than 25 percent of teen girls have used tanning salons three or more times in their lives.

While many people believe that tanning at a tanning salon is a safer alternative to sunbathing, this is not the case, according to an article published in the December 2005 issue of the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology.

“Indoor tanning is simply not safe,” said dermatologist James M. Spencer, M.D., one of the authors of the article. “A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) showed that there were 700 emergency room visits because of injuries like sunburns, infections, and eye damage from tanning bed use. In addition to these immediate injuries, tanning bed users have an increased risk of developing skin cancer, including the most deadly form, melanoma, in the long term.”

An elevated skin cancer risk is one of the most serious side effects of indoor tanning. In one study that the authors reviewed, 106,973 women from Norway and Sweden were followed for an average of eight years. Overall, regular tanning bed use was associated with a 55 percent increase in the risk of developing melanoma, especially in women between the ages of 20 and 29.

“Indoor tanning is practiced solely for cosmetic reasons,” Dr. Spencer said.

“Individuals who utilize tanning beds are intentionally putting their health at risk.”

Recently, medical organizations have been taking a harder look at indoor tanning. In March 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that no persons under the age of 18 use tanning beds. The American Academy of Dermatology Association and the Massachusetts Melanoma Foundation fully supports this recommendation and encourages states to actively pursue legislation that protects children.

“The volume of research we reviewed confirms that indoor tanning is a dangerous practice and poses great risks to a person’s health,” Dr. Spencer said. “There is no reason to participate in this activity.”

More than 10,500 people will die from skin cancer in 2005. Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the primary cause of skin cancer. Indoor tanning lamps can emit both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation at high levels and the new high-pressure UVA sunlamps can emit doses of UVA that can be as much as 15 times that of the sun, significantly increasing a tanning bed user’s skin cancer risk.

“If you really want to look tan, consider using a sunless self-tanning product,” Dr. Spencer said. “But remember to use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 15 with it.”

“While many health issues are complex and involve multiple factors, we know that ultraviolet light is the primary cause of skin cancer and avoiding excessive exposure to the sun and other forms of ultraviolet radiation is the solution,” said AAD President Dr. Clay Cockerell. “Indoor tanning is particularly troubling because it is so unnecessary. It is not associated with playing sports or other outdoor activities, but is practiced solely for cosmetic reasons. Individuals who utilize

tanning beds are intentionally putting their health at risk.”

This year, more than 1 million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States – exceeding the incidence of all other cancers combined. It is estimated that there will be about 105,750 new cases of melanoma (the deadliest form of skin cancer) in 2005, which represents a 10 percent increase in new cases of melanoma from 2004.

Indoor tanning is a booming business in the United States, generating estimated revenues in excess of \$5 billion a year. Most salons use bulbs in their tanning beds that emit a significant amount of ultraviolet B and ultraviolet A radiation – both of which are associated with the development of skin cancer and premature aging. In fact, the United States Department of Health and Human Services lists ultraviolet radiation from the sun or artificial light sources such as tanning beds and sun lamps as a known carcinogen.

The manufacturers of indoor tanning equipment are regulated at the federal level. Once manufacturers sell the equipment to tanning salons, it is generally up to each individual state to regulate their operations. While 26 states regulate tanning salon operators, the legislation varies in severity and there is limited enforcement. For example, some states go so far as to prohibit access to tanning booths by minors without parental consent, while some require salon owners to post warning signs in a visible location in the salon. However, other states may only establish educational and training standards for tanning salon operators.

“Even in those states where there are some elementary safety regulations, it is not clear if they are being enforced and what agency is enforcing them,” explained Dr. Cockerell. “That means children and teens have open access to equipment that appears to be utilized in an often careless fashion. We applaud the state legislators in Texas, California and Tennessee who have worked vigorously to enact tough legislation restricting the use of

indoor tanning facilities, especially among minors. We encourage more states to consider the WHO recommendation and enact and enforce regulations that prohibit indoor tanning for minors.”

MASSACHUSETTS

In 1993, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a law regulating sun tanning salons (M.G.L. chapter 111 sections 207-214, inclusive). This law gave local Boards of Health the authority to set forth the licensure procedures and the requirements for the maintenance and operation of tanning facilities. Unfortunately, enforcement of the regulations has been uneven due in part to the lack of financial support given local Boards of Health agents.

Our legislation would require an annual registration fee in an amount necessary to cover the expenses of administering the regulations. Annual license and renewal fees may not be more than \$250 per tanning device, and a maximum total fee per individual tanning facility may be set by rule. Registration fees received from each tanning facility shall be deposited into a “Board of Health” enforcement fund.

Further, under Massachusetts regulation 105 CMR section 123.003, during operating hours, a tanning facility must have an operator present who is sufficiently knowledgeable and trained in accordance with rules of the department in the correct operation of the tanning devices to inform and assist each customer in the proper use of the devices.

Our legislation would require operators to be registered with local Boards of Health. Registration would require not only proof of training but also an annual fee of \$100. These registration fees shall be deposited into a “Board of Health” enforcement fund.