

Lax Tanning Policies for Kids May Increase Melanoma Risk

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A majority of tanning facilities would allow a teenager to tan every day for a week straight, against FDA recommendations, researchers say.

Such a policy could increase the risk of melanoma -- particularly among the very light-skinned -- so policy changes may be in order, according to authors of two studies in the September *Archives of Dermatology*.

The first, which examined youth access to tanning facilities in 116 cities across the U.S., had college students with "young-sounding voices" call on the phone, posing as 15 year-olds seeking tanning bed appointments.

They found that 71% of tanning facilities -- tanning salons as well as spas and beauty salons that had tanning beds -- said they would allow the "teen" to tan every day during the first week of visits, according to Joni A. Mayer, PhD, of San Diego State University, and colleagues. Only 11% followed FDA recommendations of

Action Points

- Explain that over 70% of tanning facilities would allow a teenager to tan every day for a week straight, against FDA recommendations.
- Note that a second study in the *Archives of Dermatology* focused on youth tanning found that the lightest-skinned children develop more nevi and are thus at greater risk of melanoma.

three or fewer sessions in the first week of tanning.

"These data highlight the deficiencies in having recommendations versus enforceable requirements," and suggest that regulation and enforcement of tanning schedules is needed, the researchers said.

"We encourage more states to adopt indoor tanning bans for minors," they added.

The cross-sectional study of 3,647 employees of indoor tanning facilities also inquired about parental consent and accompaniment.

An "encouraging" 87% of tanning facilities required parental consent, the researchers said.

Another 14% required parental accompaniment, and 5% said they wouldn't allow a 15-year-old to tan at all.

In multivariate analyses, tanning facilities in states with youth access laws were significantly more likely to require parental consent or parental accompaniment than those in states without a youth access law ($P<0.001$).

Also, the more tanning beds a facility had, the more likely it was to require consent, the researchers said.

The finding may be due to the fact that tanning salons (as opposed to spas with a few tanning beds, for example) may feel more compelled to comply with existing laws, they said.

As far as limitations, the researchers said that facilities may be stricter during a telephone call "when a sale is more abstract." The study was also limited because only one respondent per facility was surveyed, so the data may not represent practices of all personnel.

Still, the researchers said the findings were important in terms of disease risk, which was backed by a second study in the *Archives of Dermatology* regarding tanning among young children -- particularly those with fair skin.

Very light skinned children who tan develop more nevi than those who do not, according to Lori A. Crane, PhD, MPH, of the University of Colorado in Denver, and colleagues.

Nevi have been established as an important marker for melanoma risk, Crane said, as they may be a marker for ultraviolet-induced skin damage or genetic susceptibility to melanoma.

And compared with darker-skinned white children, those with light skin have two- to- three-times greater risk of melanoma.

For their study, the researchers assessed 131 very light skinned white children and 444 darker-skinned white children born in Colorado in 1998. They excluded those who had red hair.

All children had skin examinations for three consecutive years from 2004 through 2006.

The researchers found that the mean number of nevi was significantly higher for children who tanned a lot compared with those who tanned less frequently, at all ages.

The mean number of nevi for minimally tanned children was 14.8 at age 6, 18.8 at age 7, and 22.3 at age 8.

The corresponding mean numbers for tanned children were 21.2, 27.9, and 31.9.

Differences in nevi counts between tanned and untanned children were statistically significant at all ages, the researchers said ($P<0.05$).

"Tanning avoidance may reduce the risk for melanoma in the lightest-skinned children," the researchers said.

In darker-skinned white youngsters, on the other hand, tanning had neither a risk nor a protective effect in the development of nevi.

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The researchers reported no conflicts of interest.

Primary source: Archives of Dermatology

Source reference:

[Pichon LC, et al "Youth access to artificial UV radiation exposure" *Arch Dermatol* 2009; 145\(9\): 997-1002.](#)

Additional source: Archives of Dermatology

Source reference:

[Aalborg J, et al "Tanning and increased nevus development in very light skinned children without red hair" *Arch Dermatol* 2009; 145\(9\): 989-96.](#)