



## Tanning Salons Let Teens Get Too Much Exposure, Risk Cancer

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By Nicole Ostrow

Sept. 21 (Bloomberg) -- Most indoor-tanning facilities in the U.S. allow teenage girls to get twice as many sessions of **ultraviolet light** as recommended their first week, according to researchers who urged state bans aimed at reducing cancer rates.

Almost 90 percent of tanning providers surveyed allowed teens to tan during more than the three or fewer sessions the first week that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration suggests, according to a survey released today in the Archives of Dermatology. About 71 percent of facilities said they would allow a teen to tan seven days a week.

Exposure to UV radiation from indoor tanning has been linked to **melanoma** and **squamous cell skin cancers**, prompting the International Agency for Research on Cancer in July to list sun beds and ultraviolet rays in the same high-risk group for causing cancer as plutonium and radium. Governments need to prevent people younger than 18 from exposing themselves to indoor UV rays, said Joni Mayer, an author of today's study.

"How many more cases of melanoma do we want to see in young women before something gets done?" said **Mayer**, a professor of public health at San Diego State University, in a telephone interview on Sept. 18. "What we're doing right now is not working."

The study was funded by the National Cancer Institute, in Bethesda, Maryland.

## Involving Parents

**John Overstreet**, executive director of the **Indoor Tanning Association**, an industry group based in Washington, said the decision on tanning should be left to parents, not the government, especially since tanning outdoors isn't regulated.

"Ultraviolet light is ultraviolet light whether it comes from the sun or the tanning bed," he said. "The industry strongly supports parental consent for anyone under the age of 18. Even when it's not required, most of these businesses will get it."

People exposed to UV rays before age 35 may increase their risk of developing melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer, by as much as 75 percent, the authors said. The **National Cancer Institute** estimates that 68,720 people will develop melanoma this year and 8,650 will die from the disease.

The researchers in the study used college students who posed as 15-year-old girls who were fair skinned and had never tanned before. Using the telephone, they surveyed employees of 3,647 indoor tanning facilities in 116 U.S. cities in all 50 states, according to the report.

## 87 Percent

About 87 percent of the facilities said they required parental consent and 5 percent said they wouldn't allow the teen to tan because of her age. Fourteen percent required a parent to accompany teens, the researchers said.

In the study, the average number of tanning sessions allowed during the first week was about six, double the FDA's recommended maximum of three. Mayer said the FDA's guideline, which

isn't enforceable, should be lower.

Banning teens from indoor tanning is the only way those in the health industry think they're going to be able to reduce the use of tanning, Mayer said.

"We don't think the message has really gotten to enough parents," she said. She advised them, "Do not allow your teen girls to tan. Help them find alternative ways that are safer to be tan, like spray-on tan, if your teen girl feels the need to look tan."

As of August, at least 29 states regulated the use of tanning facilities by minors, and the restrictions include some bans on tanning for children under 14, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

A law pending in Ohio would ban those younger than 18 from using indoor tanning beds. Ohio already requires tanning operators to obtain written parental consent before each tanning session. The consent form, which must be signed at the facility, authorizes the number of visits the child can purchase.

New York law prohibits children younger than 14 from using UV tanning beds and those from 14 to 18 must obtain parental consent, according to the New York State Assembly Web site. Bills proposing a ban on indoor tanning for minors are **pending** in the legislature.

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