



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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"Tanning Beds and Skin Cancer"

The ongoing debate regarding the safety of tanning beds recently took an abrupt turn, with the news release stating that, "International cancer experts have moved tanning beds and ultraviolet radiation into the top cancer risk category, deeming both to be as deadly as arsenic and mustard gas." WOW, that is a serious charge. Actually, for years, experts have considered tanning beds and ultraviolet light to be in the category of "probable carcinogens."

Unfortunately, young people have been manipulated by advertising to believe that a tanned look is a healthy "cool look." However, many dermatologists and skin experts say that, "There is no such thing as a healthy tan." Cancer experts in the U.K. believe that an upsurge of skin cancer in young people is due to tanning beds and they have begun a *SunSmart* campaign against "being too bronzed." They believe that spending time in sunbeds is just as dangerous as spending too much time in the sun. They claim that, "The intensity of UV rays in some sunbeds can be more than 10 times stronger than the midday sun."

In the U.K., Scottish politicians passed legislation banning those under 18 from using tanning beds but it has not been implemented yet. The World Health Organization has previously recommended that tanning beds be regulated because of their potential to damage DNA in the skin and serve as a cause of skin cancer. In the US, several states, including Wisconsin, require parental approval before minors can use tanning salons and at least 29 states have regulations governing minors' use of tanning salons.

As expected, tanning industry representatives disputed these claims and stated that, "There is no proven link between the responsible use of sunbeds and skin cancer." Yet, as use of tanning beds has increased among people under 30, doctors have seen a parallel rise in the numbers of young people with skin cancer. Previous studies showed that younger people who regularly use tanning beds are eight times more likely to get melanoma than people who have never used them. The American Cancer Society advises people to try bronzing or self-tanning creams instead of tanning beds.

In the America that I love, it is becoming clear that most deadly skin cancers can be avoided if people take the proper precautions when in the sun and by avoided tanning beds. We know that most lights used in tanning beds give off mainly ultraviolet radiation, which can be a cause skin and eye cancer. Folks, skin cancer is just too big of a price to pay for "looking cool."

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