



# *Town of Darien*

David Knauf, MPH, MS, RS

Director of Health  
e-mail: [dknauf@darienct.gov](mailto:dknauf@darienct.gov)

Barrington Bogle, MPH, RS, CHES  
Assistant Director of Health  
e-mail: [bbogle@darienct.gov](mailto:bbogle@darienct.gov)

## **A VERY DANGEROUS LIAISON EXISTS BETWEEN TANNING BEDS AND SKIN CANCER**

From the Darien Health Department

Spring has arrived at last and is a harbinger of warm, sunny summer weather to follow. This is the time of year that many people, including 35% of female adolescents, flock to tanning salons to get that “healthy glow” as a jump start to the summer season. Tanning salons will have you believe that the base coat tan one receives is essential, healthy, protective, and a great provider of Vitamin D. NOT SO! On the contrary, using tanning beds can be like asking for skin cancer.(1) Listed below are some facts, stunning statistics, and tips on tanning beds

- 1) **TANNING SALONS ARE A BIG BUSINESS.** Tanning trade publications report that the indoor tanning industry’s revenues have increased fivefold since 1992 to about \$5 billion per year. (2) According to industry estimates, 30 million Americans are tanning indoors annually at about 25,000 tanning salons in the country. More than 70% of them are Caucasian females aged 16-49 years of age.(3)
- 2) **OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AT RISK.** 2.3 million teenagers visit tanning salons every year in the U.S.(4) The use of tanning beds by young girls and women is growing as is their incidence of skin cancer; one calculation has found that as many as a quarter of the melanomas diagnosed in young women can be directly attributed to tanning bed use. Additionally, risk of melanoma jumps by 75% in both males and females who have used tanning beds in their teens, 20’s and early 30’s.(5)
- 3) **IT IS A PROVEN DANGER.** Many studies show that the exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light is a definite risk factor for melanoma.(6) Using a tanning bed more than 10 times a year made people 7 times more likely to develop malignant melanoma than those who did not use tanning beds as often(7) The FDA estimates that about 38,000 people will be diagnosed with melanoma this year in the U.S, and 7,300 people will die from this condition. This past summer, a report from the World Health Organization (WHO) Agency for Research on Cancer moved tanning beds with their artificial sources of UV radiation to its HIGHEST CANCER RISK CATEGORY---“**CARCINOGENIC TO HUMANS**”. Previously, the agency had classified sunlamps and tanning beds as “probably” carcinogenic; this shift has placed the devices a notch higher in terms of risk. Additionally, premature aging of the skin, basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas, conjunctivitis, corneal infections and retinal damage are associated with tanning bed exposure.(8)
- 4) **THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A “SAFE TAN”.** Many tanning salons claim that indoor tanning is safe because you are exposed to more tanning (UVA) rays than burning (UVB) rays. Medical research disputes this claim. Skin cancer is certainly associated with sunburn from UVB rays, but scientists at the FDA and other respected institutions now have evidence that even moderate tanning due to UVA rays produces the same long term skin damage as sunburn, increasing your risk of skin cancer, premature skin aging, and possible damage to your immune system.
- 5) **INDOOR TANNING MAY ACTUALLY BE MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE SUN.** Traditional tanning beds give off about three times the UVA rays that are emitted from the sun. New high pressure sunlamps emit doses of both UVA and UVB rays that can be as much as fifteen times higher than that of the sun.

**6) HOW TO PROTECT OURSELVES AND OUR YOUTH FROM INDOOR TANNING.** Currently, the FDA classifies tanning beds as “Class 1 Devices” which are in the same category as tongue depressors and elastic bandages and subject to few regulations and oversight. The Skin Cancer Foundation is advocating boosting the classification of tanning beds to a Class 2 Device. This could prevent the devices from containing mirrors which amplify the power of the UV exposure. Despite the fact that tanning beds do bear some warnings about the cancer link, the Foundation and the FDA is regulating for more specific and visible warnings for consumers of risks involved. The FDA currently requires tanning salons to direct all customers to wear protective goggles, advises consumers to limit their exposure to tanning devices, and to avoid them if you have certain medical conditions such as lupus or diabetes, or are susceptible to cold sores. Twenty five states have legislation restricting youth access to tanning beds. As of December, 2010, New York State has increased restrictions on indoor tanning requiring in-person signed parental consent for would be tanners between the ages of 14 and 18. On February 28, 2011, The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a group of 60,000 pediatricians, called for all U.S. tanning salons to bar minors. With this new policy statement, The AAP joins other respected national and international health groups such as WHO, The American Academy of Dermatology, The American Medical Association, and the Skin Cancer Foundation in supporting federal legislation to prohibit the use of indoor tanning equipment to anyone under the age of 18.

With the knowledge gained from the above information, let’s recognize this dangerous association between tanning beds and skin cancer and protect our health!

Molly S. Larson, RN  
Public Health Nurse  
Darien Department of Health

## REFERENCES

- (1) Int J Cancer 2007 March 1;120:1116-22
- (2) Arch Dermatol 2003;139:443-8
- (3) J Am Acad Dermatol 1998;38:89-98
- (4) J AmAcadDrmatol2003;46:700-5
- (5) J Am Acad of Dermatol 2001; 44:775-80
- (6) Euro. J Cancer 2005 January; 41 (1):45-60
- (7) Br J Cancer 200;82:1593-9
- (8) J Natl Cancer Inst 2002 February 6;94(3):224-6