



Amanda Paola lays back for a session at a tanning salon in Monroe.

CONNECTICUT POST FILE PHOTO

COLORED BY DANGER?

Study finds tanning bed use increases risk of skin cancer

By Katrina Koerting
STAFF WRITER

When people lay down in tanning beds, they might be getting more than a little color to their skin.

Tanning beds, or sun beds, are now grouped in the highest cancer risk group, group 1, an increase to its previous classification of "probably carcinogenic to humans," the International Agency for Research on Cancer said in a study released July 29.

Other carcinogens in this group are radioiodines, which are found in survivors of nu-

clear reactor accidents, and plutonium.

"This study is a big deal," said Dr. Ivan S. Cohen, a dermatologist on the board of dermatology at Yale-New Haven Hospital and in private practice in Fairfield. He said now that it is official that tanning beds are a high cancer risk, the state's dermatology society might be able to work for regulations on tanning beds, such as the amount of time spent in them.

Currently, the only regulation in place for tanning salons is that anyone under the age

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of 16 get written permission from a parent or guardian to use them.

Cohen said people using tanning beds are more likely to get skin cancer, wrinkles and aged skin. The high intensity UVA rays found in tanning beds, which are 10 to 12 times more powerful than UV rays from the sun. These rays harm the skin by damaging the DNA of the cell and release free radicals, the chemicals that cause cell mutations and thus age the skin and make people more susceptible to skin cancer. Ultraviolet light also causes cataracts.

There are three types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, the most common and least dangerous; squamous cell carcinoma; and melanoma, the most dangerous and least common. The study said the risk of getting melanoma is now 75 percent for people who use tanning beds before age 30.

Cohen said there is a higher risk for people who are fair skinned, such as blondes with blue eyes or redheads with freckles, as well as young children.

Dr. Jeremy Moss, a dermatologist on staff at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport and in private practice in Bridgeport, said more than a million non-melanoma cases of skin cancer are reported a year.

According to the American Cancer Society's Web site, about 68,720 new cases of melanoma will be diagnosed in the United States during 2009. The site predicts about 11,590 deaths from skin cancer will occur this year: 8,650 from melanoma and 2,940 from other skin cancers.

"There's no benefit to using a tanning bed other than making you look tan," Cohen said. "They advertise as only using tanning rays and not burning rays (UVB) but UVA is just as bad if not worse than UVB because they penetrate deeper."

There are also a few UVB rays found in tanning beds.

"The only thing the sun is good for is Vitamin D production, but you only need about a minute a day," Cohen added.

While Cohen admits you might be able to get Vitamin D from tanning beds, he doesn't recommend it. "All you have to do is walk with your arms open on the way to the tanning booth and you have enough Vitamin D."

"I hope this wakes some people up because every day I see people in my office with skin cancer because of ultra violet light tanning," Moss said.

He said it might be hard to change habits.

By the numbers

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"People forget that tanning is addictive. It releases a lot of endorphins that make people feel good, and when they stop tanning they actually experience withdrawal symptoms," he said.

Another reason for not stopping is that society and pop culture promote being tan.

Amanda Riley, the manager of Hollywood Tans in Stratford, said she has seen a decrease in customers, but said the decrease has more to do with the season than with the study. It's summer, she said, and people are tanning outside.

She said she does not expect to see a decrease in customers within the coming months, either, due to the study's results.

"A lot of the people that come here have been coming for years," Riley said. "I know it's not a smart thing to ignore things like (the study's results), but some people do." She said she is unsure of the number of people who go to the tanning salon where she works, but that it's "a lot of people".

Laura Baker, 20, of Shelton, who has been going to tanning salons for three years, said the study has influenced her decision to go to the tanning salons less.

"Now that the study is out, I'll probably go a little less, but just a little because I don't go much anyway," she said.

Baker goes to her 15-minute sessions twice a week for a month at a time, one month in the winter and one month right before the summer starts.

"I got second-degree sunburns once, and I figured a base tan would keep the burns from happening," Baker said of her reason for the month of tanning beds before the summer. "I only go for two months because then I have the natural sun."