



Australia, New South Wales plans to ban tanning beds from 2014: here's what we think about this.

The scare tactics against tanning beds which has led to NSW planning to ban them is doing the public more harm than good in the fight against skin cancer.

The public need to get the message that wherever you get your UV exposure, be that outdoors from the sun or indoor tanning beds you should never burn and do not get excessive exposure eg:daily. It is not tanning beds that cause skin cancer it is UV exposure that damages the skin and may lead to skin cancer. Some UV exposure is necessary for good health; finding out how much and for how long and for which skin type is both complex and the subject of many conflicting studies.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) report, which is the main source of claims to ban tanning beds, simply raised the classification of tanning devices from 'presumed to be a human carcinogen' to 'known to be a human carcinogen'. This category does not state the level of 'toxicity' (risk). If we were to ban all items in this category we would also have to ban sunshine and oral contraceptives!

Further, of all the items listed in this carcinogenic category UV exposure (via sunshine and/or tanning devices) is the only item necessary to sustain human life.

People of skin type 1 (very fair, often burns, rarely tans) are genetically predisposed to skin cancer and should be extremely careful with any UV exposure, we recommend (in line with the Aus/NZ solarium standard) people with skin type 1 do not use a tanning bed. This said, many of the studies quoted stating the relative risk of using a tanning bed specifically used skin type 1 individuals. Accordingly when the IARC report is quoted as alleging "risk of skin melanoma is increased by 75% when people start using tanning beds before age 30" is academic fraud and misleads the public. When you remove skin type 1 from the analysis there was no increase risk for the study group. The logical conclusion should therefore be to ban skin type 1 from using a tanning bed – this is already the case in Australia and New Zealand in any solarium upholding the voluntary regulations.

The report also states that "The evidence gathered on sunbed use and skin cancer so far is limited by problems with the characterization of exposure and the potential confounding effect of sun exposure." With the science being unable to clearly show that tanning beds are a problem, the Australian and New Zealand sun being very harsh by world standards and that the human body needs UV exposure surely individuals should have the choice as to how they receive their UV exposure whether outdoors in the sun or indoor on a tanning bed.

There is risk in everything we do in life. Balance and moderation is the key; never sunburn, and know your skin type so you can moderate your exposure accordingly.