



October 2009

Policy Statement

Sunbeds

The risks

Cancer Research UK does not recommend the use of sunbeds for cosmetic purposes.ⁱ There is growing evidence to show that the use of sunbeds increases the risk of malignant melanoma, especially in people who find it difficult to tan. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has concluded that there is convincing evidence to support a causal relationship between sunbed use and skin cancer, particularly with exposure before the age of 35 years.¹ It has been estimated that sunbeds cause 100 deaths from melanomas every year in the UK.²

Young people

We are especially concerned by the use of sunbeds by young people as we know that younger skin is at particular risk.³ A growing number of reports show that significant numbers of young people are using sunbeds and there do not appear to be many barriers to use. Around 6% of young people (11-17 years old) in the UK have used a sunbed, approximately 16% of whom described using a sunbed in an unsupervised setting.^{ii,4}

We believe that under-18s should not be permitted to use sunbeds and support the banning of unstaffed, coin-operated salons immediately.

Regulation of the sunbed industry

Voluntary regulation of the sunbed industry is currently inconsistent and largely unmonitored, and we believe this places users at greater risk. For example, The Sunbed Association, the industry trade body, believes it only has around 20% of salons in membership.⁵ As The Sunbed Association is considered to represent the more responsible end of the market, this is especially worrying. In addition, some communications from the industry have dismissed the health risks associated with sunbed use and marketed the benefits of use for the maintenance of adequate Vitamin D levels and for good health.⁶ We therefore support calls for a licensing scheme for salons and other premises offering the use of tanning facilities to members of the public.

To this effect, Cancer Research UK welcomed Scotland's Public Health Act 2008, which contains measures to better regulate the sunbed industry, with implementation in December 2009. The legislation will prohibit the unsupervised use of sunbeds, the sale and hire of sunbeds for the home by under-18s plus the use of sunbeds in a commercial setting by those under the age of 18. The operator's duty to provide and display

ⁱ Sunbeds can also be used for medicinal purposes.

ⁱⁱ We have defined supervision to be the provision of information about how to use a sunbed and the risks associated with use, and a member of staff present to supervise sunbed use.



information for users will also be enforced, with an authorised officer of a local authority having the power to enter premises and impose fixed penalties for those not complying with the legislation.

We support greater regulation of the sunbed industry as we believe it could ensure that a number of minimum health, safety and good practice guidelines were met in all tanning facilities. For example, regulation could certify that health information resources were displayed in all salons, describing people most at risk of any type of skin cancer and advising them against sunbed use. Adults should be free to make their own decisions about sunbed use, but we believe they should do so knowing the dangers involved. We recommend that those with fair or freckly skins, a lot of moles, who have had skin cancer in the past, with a family history of melanoma and/or those using medication that increases sensitivity to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, should be discouraged from using sunbeds for cosmetic purposes.

Cancer Research UK also believes that salon regulation could provide an opportunity for premises to be thoroughly inspected, encourage salons to effectively train all staff and guarantee that sunbed sessions are monitored. It would also provide an opportunity to record more information about the sunbed industry.

Sunbed legislation is currently in placeⁱⁱⁱ in seven EU member states, Norway, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Legislation was introduced in Australia after a study by Western Australia's Department of Health found that at least 80% of businesses were not complying with the voluntary Australian standard.⁷ Therefore, in April 2008 Western Australia together with South Australia and Victoria became the first states to regulate sunbed use. The regulations include measures to prohibit under-18s and those with skin type 1 from using sunbeds, as well as restricting exposure and/or frequency of repeat exposure by those who choose to use sunbeds.

Local authority premises

Cancer Research UK supports the continued phasing-out of tanning facilities in local authority premises. Local authorities are committed to promoting health and well-being in their communities and the location of sunbeds in some local authority-owned facilities sends a mixed message to the public.

Manufacture

We also believe that all sunbeds manufactured and sold in the European Union (EU) should carry a prominent, clear and permanent warning, highlighting the risks associated with use.

Further research

There is much that is not known about patterns of sunbed use in the UK. For example, though we believe that sunbed salons are more likely to be situated in deprived areas, we

ⁱⁱⁱ Albeit varying in content.



have limited knowledge about the exact location of premises, the cost of sessions and the safety guidelines that are adhered to.

Cancer Research UK has identified a number of evidence gaps and future research needs,⁸ which once fulfilled would give a more complete picture of sunbed use across the UK. This, in turn, would help us to provide more relevant health information resources to users and to better target our public information work.

Cancer Research UK is funding a project to map the location of sunbed salons in the South West of England. Working in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and trading standards officers, the project team will seek to build an accurate picture of salon locations in a region of England.

In 2007, all four UK nations requested that the Health Protection Agency Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) update its advice regarding the safety of sunbeds in the UK. Cancer Research UK sat on the COMARE sub-committee responsible for developing a report and strongly welcomed the report's recommendations.

England's Cancer Reform Strategy committed to gather more information about the number and distribution of sunbeds and the scale of sunbed use by minors.⁹ To this effect, Cancer Research UK was commissioned by the Department of Health in 2008 to carry out a scoping study to establish the national prevalence of sunbed use amongst under-18s, including an assessment of regional variation of use across six cities. Results published in late 2008 showed that around 6% of young people had used a sunbed, and of the six cities surveyed, greatest prevalence was found in Liverpool where 22% of 11-17 year olds had used a sunbed.¹⁰ In light of these results, the Department of Health commissioned Cancer Research UK to expand this study. The final results of the expanded study will be published shortly.

The Department for Public Health and Health Professions similarly commissioned Cancer Research UK to conduct a study to identify the prevalence of sunbed use amongst under-18s in Wales. A report was delivered to the Department in April 2009.



Background

Sunbeds have been linked to a variety of poor health conditions including eye damage, photodermatosis, photosensitivity, premature skin ageing and skin cancer.¹¹ UV rays from sunbeds have been classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by IARC, which means they cause cancer in humans.¹² The UV emissions from many sunbeds are greater than those from the midday sun in the Mediterranean.^{13,14,15}

Malignant melanoma

Over the last 25 years, rates of malignant melanoma in the UK have risen faster than any other common cancer, and more than 2,300 people die from skin cancer each year. This is a clear indication of the need for continued prevention and early treatment to avert the potential loss of many years of life. On average, about 20 years of life are lost for each melanoma death in the UK.¹⁶

SunSmart

SunSmart is the UK's national skin cancer awareness programme. It is commissioned by the UK Health Departments and run by Cancer Research UK.

The SunSmart campaign aims to increase the profile of skin cancer and effective methods of protection and specifically to:

- Increase knowledge of the causes of skin cancer and the importance of early detection among defined target groups;
- Increase awareness of actions that can be taken to prevent skin cancer; and
- Positively influence attitudes to sun protection.

We know that sustained public health promotion has helped to cut deaths from, and initiate a reduction in incidence of, malignant melanoma in the younger generations in Australia.¹⁷ This has been achieved by raising awareness, influencing attitudes, facilitating behaviour change and encouraging people to seek medical help for skin changes early, when they are more likely to have curable disease.

We believe that long-term skin cancer prevention campaigns are necessary to increase public knowledge, alter attitudes and affect the behavioural changes needed to reverse the trends in skin cancer incidence across the UK. We therefore welcomed the Cancer Reform Strategy's commitment to increased funds for skin cancer prevention campaigns.

It is encouraging to see that all four UK nations have identified exposure to UV light as a key area for action for cancer prevention as part of their cancer strategies.

For more information please visit the SunSmart website www.sunsmart.org.uk or contact Cancer Research UK's Policy and Public Affairs team on 020 7061 8360 or publicaffairs@cancer.org.uk.



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