

# Tanning Businesses Downplay Risks, Admit Preteens

Jenni Laidman

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Despite clear evidence that ultraviolet (UV) radiation exposure from tanning beds is associated with an increased risk for skin cancer, 65% of 243 Missouri tanning facilities said they would allow children as young as 10 or 12 years to use tanning beds, 80% said use of tanning beds would prevent sunburn, and 43% said the practice was risk-free, according to a study [published online](#) February 25 in *Pediatrics*.

Brundha Balaraman, MD, second-year resident in dermatology, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri, and colleagues surveyed tanning facilities across Missouri twice. Two medical students posing as 16-year-olds asked tanning salon employees about use of the tanning facilities.

Among the businesses surveyed, 40% mentioned a risk for skin cancer and 20% claimed there was no risk for anyone who took proper precautions. Some tanning employees said that tanning beds were safer than the sun, were physician-recommended, or carried some other health benefit.

Indoor tanning is a \$5 billion industry with more tanning salons in cities than Starbucks or McDonalds, report Sophie J. Balk, MD, professor of clinical pediatrics, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, New York City, and colleagues in an accompanying editorial. A 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey showed that a quarter of high school girls used indoor tanning more than once in the past year, and 49% of all tanning patrons used tanning beds 10 or more times in the past year.

The Missouri survey found that a mean of 65.2% of tanning employees surveyed would allow children as young as 10 or 12 years to tan, and policies regarding parental approval were inconsistent. Of employees who worked in the morning, 77.2% requested on-site parental approval, as did 46.6% of the employees who worked in the evening.

In view of the findings, the editorial authors call for a US Food and Drug administration ban on the use of tanning beds for anyone younger than 18 years.

"Given that one-third of states have no laws of any kind regulating minors' [tanning]-bed use, and nearly all remaining states have a patchwork of regulations such as age bans, parental consent, or performance standards, it is incumbent upon the FDA to enact a national under-18 salon tanning ban," the editorial authors write.

Although a mean of 84.6% of the Missouri tanning employees said eye protection was required, when the surveyor mentioned a fear of developing "raccoon eyes," 44% relented. As a result, 56% endorsed tanning without eye protection.

Only 22.6% of tanning employees mentioned a need to assess skin type to determine exposure duration. A mean of 19.8% would allow customers to start with the longest-duration exposure, although 65.4% recommended starting with low UV intensity. None of the operators asked about possible contraindications such as lupus or other medical conditions, previous skin cancer diagnosis, or use of photosensitizing medications.

Tanning bed UV exposure is more dangerous than that from the sun, research shows. A recent case-control study found a 74% increased risk for melanoma with a single use of tanning beds compared with never using a tanning bed. Studies show that risk increases with repeated use of tanning beds and with younger age of use. Tanning beds are associated with a 1.5-fold increased risk for basal cell carcinoma, a 2.5-fold increased risk for squamous cell carcinoma, and up to a 3-fold increased risk for

melanoma, particularly with use before age 30 years. Tanning also associates with premature photoaging and eye damage.

The study authors recommend that tanning devices be considered class 2 or 3 medical devices, which would require regulatory oversight of the manufacturers. In addition, they recommend legislation that sets minimum age limits for tanning facilities and requires salons provide safety information to potential customers.

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