

Tanning beds as carcinogenic as asbestos and cigarettes

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The ultraviolet light used in tanning beds is as carcinogenic as asbestos, arsenic, radium and cigarettes, a special committee of the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer has concluded. The



use of sunlamps had previously been classified only as "probably carcinogenic in humans." Moreover, the committee concluded that all types of UV radiation induce cancer, not just the UV-B that has been implicated in the past. Some tanning salons claim to use only UV-A, which was thought to be safer, but the committee said that is not the case.

The committee of 20 scientists from nine countries met in June and reviewed more than 20 studies in humans, as well as animal studies. They reported online in the journal *Lancet Oncology* that the risk of skin cancer increases 75% when people start using tanning beds before age 30. They also found that all types of ultraviolet radiation caused tumors, not just UV-B.

UV radiation produces a specific mutation in DNA in skin cells, converting a cytidine base to thymidine, thereby triggering the cancer process. The studies show that this transformation occurs no matter what type of UV radiation is employed.

Previous studies have shown that younger people who use tanning beds regularly are eight times as likely to get melanoma as those who do not. Melanoma is also becoming increasingly prevalent in young people, whereas at one time it was observed mostly in those over age 75. The American Cancer Society urges young people to use bronzing creams rather than tanning beds.

Photo credit: Los Angeles Times