

Study: Tanning beds definitely cause skin cancer

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A new scientific analysis has upgraded tanning beds' cancer risk from a likely cause to a definite cause of the disease.

The report, by experts at the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the cancer arm of the World Health Organization, changes the category for tanning beds and other sources of ultraviolet radiation. It concludes skin cancer risk increases 75 percent for those who used tanning beds before the age of 30.

The experts also found mutations in mice when exposed to either UVA or UVB light. Previously, only one type of ultraviolet radiation was thought to be lethal.

Their report, published in the August edition of *Lancet Oncology*, analyzed 20 separate studies.

"Claims are that tanning beds are UVA light, and that doesn't cause a problem, but the report puts that theory to rest," said Dr. Len Lichtenfeld, deputy chief medical officer for the American Cancer Society in Atlanta, who read the findings. "It says it doesn't matter if it's UVA or UVB [light]."

Tanning beds have long been controversial, especially for use by young people. Many teens use tanning beds to get a base tan or before a big event. This study should give them pause, Lichtenfeld said.

Advocates for tanning salons said in a statement Tuesday the information is not new.

"The fact that the IARC has put tanning bed use in the same category as sunlight is hardly newsworthy," said Dan Humiston, president of the Indoor Tanning Association.

"The UV light from a tanning bed is equivalent to UV light from the sun, which has had a Group One classification since 1992. Some other items in this category are red wine, beer and salted fish," he said, adding the ITA had always emphasized the importance of moderation when it comes to UV light from either the sun or a tanning bed.

In Britain, where the *Lancet* report originates, melanoma is now the leading cause of cancer in women in their 20s.

Shannon McGeever, manager of Perfect Color Tanning Salon in Farmingdale, said overexposure and burning the skin is what causes the damage.

"We teach how to tan properly, and we are familiar with all the different skin cancers and how to recognize and how to prevent them, and we do take the right precautions to make sure we tan people as safely as possible," she said.

Lichtenfeld emphasized that the study says there is no safe use of tanning beds. "This study says UVA causes skin cancer," Lichtenfeld said. "It's a Class One carcinogen. This causes cancer. Period. End of statement," he said.

Dr. Colette Pameijer, a cancer surgeon at Stony Brook University Medical Center, said the report was comprehensive. "They basically summarized all known data on UV radiation and risk for skin cancer in both humans and animals, and their conclusion should be taken very, very seriously," she said.

With Kwame Opam, AP