

Think twice before tanning — it's best to avoid those rays

Like many of her peers, Jacqui Yankus wants that sun-kissed glow.

"To look better," the 17-year-old Springboro High School senior said of the reason tanning is so popular for women and teens. "To look not so worn out."

Yankus sunbathes three hours, two or so times a week in the summer, an act her mom, a survivor of sun-related skin cancer, can't stand.

"She just says if you want to get out there, you have to put sunscreen on," Yankus said after trying for the first time a spray tan from Airbrush Tropical Tanning, a small mobile service owned by Nikki Swisher of Springboro.

Health care officials say spray tanning is a safe alternative to tanning in the sun or a tanning bed, something Yankus said she has never done.

"People are looking for ways to have a nice looking, natural tan without the risk of cancer," Swisher said.

The most common cancer

Peter Osborne, a spokesman for the American Cancer Society of Northwest and Southwest Ohio, said people should wear sunscreen and limit exposure to the sun. He has no use for indoor tanning.

"People should avoid tanning beds, period, end of sentence," he said, adding UV rays cause skin cancer, the most common form of cancer in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Melanoma of the skin, the third most common skin cancer, is the most dangerous and can be fatal, particularly for young people, the agency said.

The CDC estimates that 65 to 90 percent of melanomas are caused by exposure to sunlight or ultraviolet light.

An average of 2,118 new cases of melanoma cancer were diagnosed in Ohio each year between 2002 and 2006, according to the Ohio Department of Health, which notes 1.3 percent of all cancer deaths in Ohio were due to melanoma skin cancer.

Industry: Impact overstated

John Overstreet, executive director of the Indoor Tanning Association, the trade organization for the industry, said the dangers of tanning beds are exaggerated.

The controversial 10 percent federal tax on recipients of tanning services built in to the health care overhaul took effect Thursday, July 1.

While federal officials consider the tax a method to dissuade people from a dangerous practice, Overstreet called the tax the result of a back door deal to get the American Medical Association's support.

"The science on melanoma and indoor tanning is anything but conclusive," he said. "What you get from (sunscreen manufacturers and medical officials) is they have an agenda and they have a lot of money and they say the same thing over and over again, but it doesn't make it so."

He said his industry acknowledges that there is a danger of overexposure to the sun, but added the body needs sun.

"You do need to be exposed to ultraviolet light," he said. "Your body needs Vitamin D."

George Houser, owner of Bronze Salon Tanning Center in Centerville, said that "the great creator" gave people the natural ability to produce Vitamin D through UV rays. The notion that tanning in moderation is dangerous is ludicrous.

"It is borderline blasphemy," Houser said, adding that the 10 percent tanning tax is unfair to small businesses. "It's going to be devastating. It might be the death of a lot of small businesses like myself."

Doctors say the evidence is clear

Dr. Julian Trevino, chairman of the department of dermatology at the Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine, said studies clearly show that UV rays from the sun as well as tanning beds can lead to skin cancers. About 10 minutes of sunlight a few times a week is enough and the body can get enough Vitamin D through diet and supplements, he said.

"We're not (saying) people can't go outside of the house," he said, but he encourages proper use of sunscreen.

Nationally, only 56 percent of adults usually practice at least one of the three sun-protective behaviors in 2005: use sunscreen, wear sun-protective clothing or seek shade, according to the CDC.

Trevino said there is new evidence that the body can develop an addiction to using tanning beds.

"When you get in the tanning booth it stimulates things that make you feel good," he said. "People keep going back because they like the substances that released in their body."

Battle against indoor tanning

Groups including the Ohio Dermatological Association are pushing for stronger regulation of tanning especially for youths.

Nearly 9 percent of teens ages 14 to 17 used indoor tanning devices in 2005, the CDC reported.

Girls were seven times more likely than boys to tan indoors.

Last year, State Reps. Courtney Combs, R-Hamilton, and Lorraine Fende, D-Willowick, introduced legislation that would ban indoor tanning for anyone younger than 18 unless that child had a doctor's prescription saying ultraviolet radiation treatments are necessary.

The legislation has not been voted on by the General Assembly.

Trevino, who has treated people in their 20s and 30s with skin cancer, said that a tan is the result of the body defending itself from damaging rays.

"You get a pretty big chunk of the damage when you're younger," he said, noting that once the damage is done, it is there. "Cells can really take a lot, but eventually if you do enough damage, you going get that damaged cell (cancer)."