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# What Are The Hazards Of Indoor Tanning?

It's very troubling — and thankfully rare — to see young adults visit my office with several malignant melanomas. Although some of these young patients have a positive family history and are genetically predisposed to the potentially deadly skin cancer, many are not. Often they are young women with no known risk factors, except a history of overzealous exposure to tanning beds.

Most tanning salon customers — 70 percent — are girls and women, and melanoma is the second-most common cancer in women 20 to 29, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Of the 30 million people who tan indoors annually in the United States, more than 2 million are teens. Florida does restrict indoor tanning for minors, at least: A parent

or guardian's signature is required before anyone younger than 18 uses a tanning bed, and children younger than 14 must be accompanied to the tanning salon by a parent.

Indoor tanning is clearly a risk. Ultraviolet radiation from the sun and artificial sources, such as tanning beds and sunlamps, has been declared a cancer-causing substance by the Department of Health and Human Services. Mounting scientific evidence indicates that long ultraviolet rays — the type of light used by the tanning industry — can cause melanoma and skin wrinkling, also known as premature aging. UVA is used because it is well known that short ultraviolet light (UVB) can cause sunburn and basal and squamous cell carcinomas, the more common skin cancers. Dermatologists are not advocating a return to UVB lights by the industry, but calling for increased public awareness of the serious risks associated with indoor tanning devices.

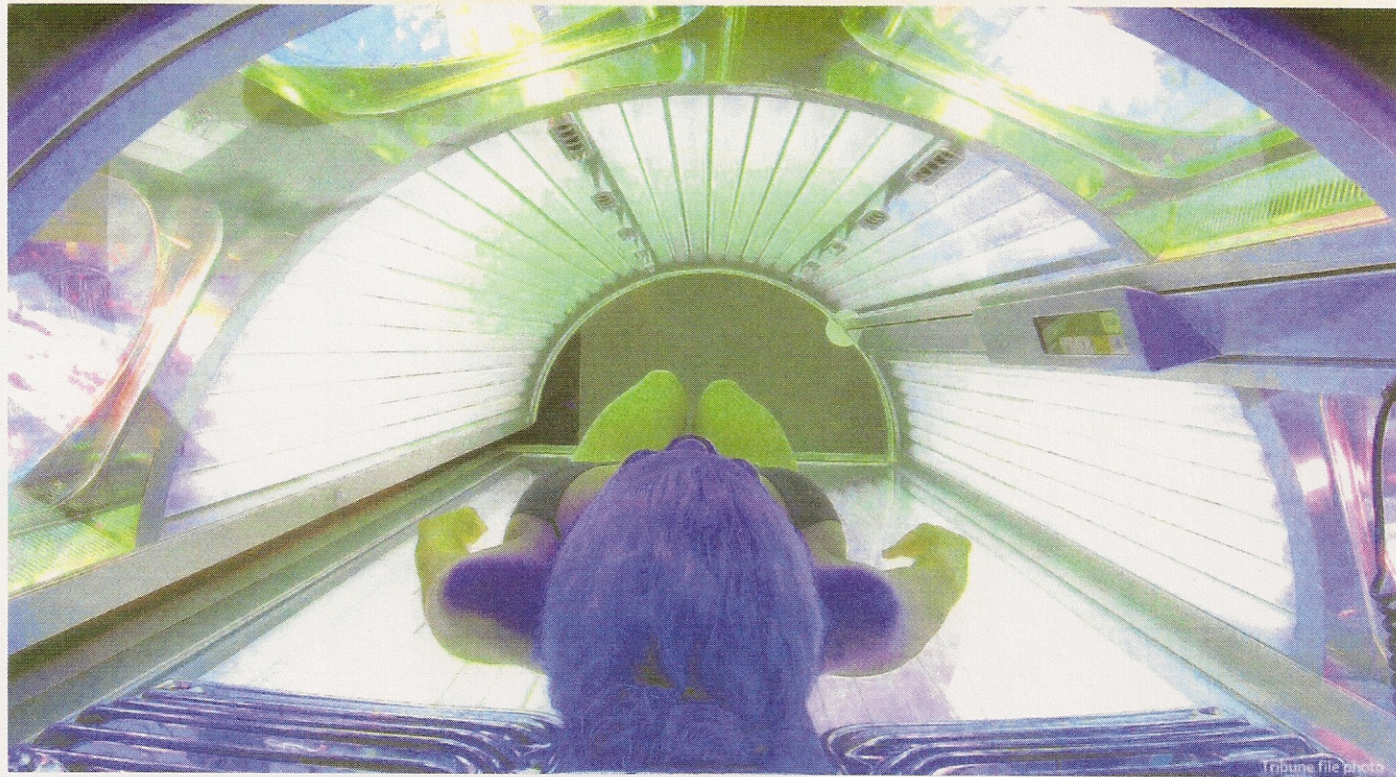
An important step in the right direction was taken this past fall, when President Bush signed into law the Tanning Accountability and Notification Act. The bipartisan legislation directs the FDA to ensure that the tanning industry effectively communicates to the public the risks of skin cancer and irreversible skin damage caused by indoor tanning equipment. The FDA, which regulates this equipment, will re-examine the language and positioning of warning labels on tanning beds and conduct consumer testing to determine whether the labels are understood. The act requires the secretary of Health and Human Services to report the results back to Congress in a year, including measures being taken to significantly reduce the risks of indoor tanning devices.

While some seek complete elimination of indoor tanning, the industry has largely attempted to debunk the hazards altogether. My position is one of moderation. I oppose indoor tan-

ning for minors because childhood exposure to ultraviolet light is a significant risk factor for skin cancer later in life. However, I don't believe an outright ban of indoor tanning will work for adults. In an ideal world we would avoid everything that brings risk to our lives; however, this is both impractical (e.g. driving) and harder yet for addictive substances, such as tobacco and alcohol, in real life. Recently, some studies have suggested that repetitive tanning may be a kind of addiction.

It's up to health professionals, government and advocacy groups to lead the charge to educate consumers about the risks of tanning and, when feasible, try to eliminate them.

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