

Public Health Committee

March 15, 2013

SB872 An Act Concerning the Use of Indoor Tanning Devices by Persons Under Eighteen Years of Age

My name is Dr. Pat Checko. I am a retired health official and a member of the Connecticut Cancer Partnership. Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States, developing in approximately 1,000,000 Americans each year, and melanoma, the most severe of the three types of skin cancer ranks fifth in incidence among men and women in Connecticut. We are unfortunately, a nation of sun worshippers. Roughly, 10% of Americans continue to use indoor tanning beds. Young people, in particular, have difficulty grasping their own mortality, and may not think they are vulnerable to skin cancer. Yet, 68,000 people in the U.S. will learn they have melanoma this year, and 1 out of 8 will die from it. The American Academy of Dermatology reports that melanoma is the second most common cancer in women 20-29 years old.

In July 2009, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) moved tanning devices that emit UV radiation into the highest risk category: “carcinogenic to humans”. This action was based on the results of 19 studies conducted over 25 years on the use of indoor tanning equipment that found:

- An association between indoor tanning and two types of skin cancer: squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma
- An association between UV-emitting tanning devices and cancer of the eye (ocular melanoma)
- Both UV-A and UV-B rays causing DNA damage, which can lead to skin cancer in laboratory animals and humans
- The risk of melanoma of the skin is increased by 75% when tanning bed use started before the age of 35

The report noted that since cancer is a long process that takes many years and recommended banning commercial indoor tanning for those younger than 18 years to protect them from the increased risk for melanoma and other skin cancers.

Another recent study, conducted at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, followed the tanning bed use of more than 73,000 nurses – first during high school and college, and then when the women were between 25 and 35 years of age. The study found that tanning beds increased skin cancer risk over time, and showed a “dose-response effect”. In other words, the more visits to the tanning parlor, the higher the women’s risk for skin cancer. The risk for basal and squamous cell carcinoma jumped 15% for every 4 visits to an indoor tanning bed each year. And the risk of developing melanoma increased by 11%. The author, Dr. Mingfeng Zhang, stated that “Using during high school/college had a stronger effect on the increased risk for basal cell carcinoma compared with use during ages 25 to 35.”

In March 2010 an advisory panel to the U.S. FDA recommended a ban on indoor tanning by minors and in 2011, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a statement supporting such a ban.

It is clear that the indoor tanning industry targets teenage girls in their advertising. Print and online advertising to teenage and college-aged girls frequently offers student discounts and “prom”, “homecoming”, and “back-to-school” specials according to a new report released by Rep. Waxman, DeLauro and others on Feb.1.2012. Energy and Commerce Committee Investigators, representing themselves as fair-skinned teenagers, surveyed 300 tanning salons nationwide. They questioned each salon about the benefits and risks of indoor tanning, how frequently customers could use tanning beds, and about any discounts for students or teens. In addition to the advertising findings, they also reported that:

- Nearly all of the salons denied the known risks of tanning. Ninety percent of the salons stated that indoor tanning did not pose a health risk, while over half of the salons denied that indoor tanning would increase the risk of skin cancer.
- Nearly 80% of the salons asserted that indoor tanning would be beneficial to the health of a fair-skinned teenage girl. Several salons asserted that indoor tanning would prevent cancer.
- Tanning salons fail to follow FDA recommendations on tanning frequency. Three-quarters of salons allow customers to tan daily, despite FDA recommendations that indoor tanning be limited to no more than three visits in the first week.
- Salons used many approaches to downplay the health risks of indoor tanning. Salons stated that young people are not at risk for developing skin cancer; that rising rates of skin cancer are linked to increased use of sunscreen; that government regulators had certified the safety of indoor tanning; and that “it’s got to be safe, or else they wouldn’t let us do it.” Salons also frequently referred the investigators to industry websites that downplay indoor tanning’s health risks and tout the practice’s alleged health benefits.

This is a public health intervention that could have a dramatic effect on reducing the number of people who will suffer and die from skin cancer.