



**Cancer Society New Zealand
Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa**

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Sunbed use is not only harmful but it may be addictive!

According to a US study of over 400 university students, the use of sunbeds may become addictive for some young adults. Over half the surveyed students reported having used indoor tanning facilities. A significant proportion of this group also reported using addictive substances.

The study, focusing on addiction, found that individuals who use drugs may be more likely to develop a dependency on indoor tanning because of a similar addictive process.

Skin Cancer Advisor for the Cancer Society, Dr Judith Galtry, says "while we do not know if this behaviour is mirrored in New Zealand, it is important that young people are made aware of the risks of sunbeds. More importantly the New Zealand government needs to move quickly to enact legislation banning individuals under 18 from using them, given the associated health risks.

"For many young people, they may find they start something but then become trapped in addictive patterns, particularly if it is seen to be socially acceptable through marketing and peer group pressure. These patterns may last many years and have individual costs as well as significant costs to the health system."

Dr Galtry notes that we should not focus on 'individual choice' but look at the bigger picture. "It is important to recognize that young people often don't have the necessary tools to make the right decisions. This is reinforced where there is pressure from direct or indirect marketing such as from the sunbed, tobacco and alcohol industries. Like tobacco displays and alcohol advertising, sunbeds are often marketed directly to young people who are most at risk from their use."

Significantly, in the United States the Federal Trade Commission has just approved a settlement order against the Indoor Tanning Association for making misleading and exaggerated claims about the safety of sunbeds. Young people in particular may not be able to distinguish between various claims made by the industry.

In Australia, a number of health and medical workers are joining together to support an outright ban on the industry.

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A new study released in the June edition of *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention* provides strong evidence of a link between sunbed exposure and risk of melanoma.

Of particular interest the study shows;

- The risk of melanoma increased 74% for those who had ever tanned indoors compared with those who had never engaged in indoor tanning
- Melanoma risk increased markedly with frequency, hours and years of sunbed use
- The risk increased up to four-fold for those who used high UVR intensity devices as compared to conventional sunbed devices. This is a special risk for New Zealand and Australia given permissible high UVR intensity levels.