

ARE TANNING BOOTHS SAFE?

In a word.....no.

Many people are surprised to hear that, since most tanning salons insist there is no danger. But remember, very few salon employees are even aware of the dangers of artificial tanning, and almost none could recognize those dangers in time to do anything about them.

The people who work in tanning salons are not doctors. Most have no training in any health field at all. They know little or nothing about ultraviolet light. Few know that there are different types of UV light and different types of skin. Even fewer can identify people with skin easily damaged by ultraviolet light. Still fewer ask what medications their clients are taking. None are qualified to identify a malignant melanoma, or any other light-induced skin cancer.

In short, most salon employees are blissfully unaware of the risks of artificial tanning. So they tell you whatever the tanning booth manufacturers tell them. And manufacturers (who aren't doctors either) are only interested in selling tanning booths.

This is what the folks in tanning salons should be telling you: There is unequivocal evidence from animal studies that tanning booths - even the "safe" ones - are unsafe. Tanning booths emit concentrated ultraviolet light, which causes skin cancer, damage to connective tissue (collagen), and damage to Langerhans cells, an important component of your immune system. Ultraviolet light can cause cataracts and other major damage to unprotected eyes and the goggles supplied in tanning salons do not always protect your eyes properly.

All of this can happen if your skin is normal. If you have fair skin that burns easily or doesn't tan well, a family history of melanoma or other skin cancer, one or more dysplastic (suspicious) moles, a light-sensitive disease such as lupus, or if you are taking a light-sensitizing medication, your risk is far greater.

The problem is not so much that millions of people patronize tanning salons regularly, as this is after all, a free country, but that many of those patrons are unaware of the risk they are taking when they do so. If you are thinking of subjecting your skin to the ravages of concentrated ultraviolet light, consider the possible consequences, both now and in twenty or thirty years, versus the possible benefits. Ask yourself if those benefits are worth those consequences.

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