Solariums

Key points
- Ultraviolet (UV) radiation, whether from the sun or a solarium, damages the skin and increases the risk of skin cancer.
- Solariums can emit UV radiation that is much stronger than the midday summer sun.
- Solariums are not a 'safe' or 'controlled' way to tan.
- Using a solarium even for a short time can greatly increase your risk of skin cancer.
- Cancer Council does not support tanning in solariums under any circumstances.

Some people think that a tan is a sign of good health. In reality, a tan is a sign that your skin has been exposed to too much UV radiation and that damage has occurred. Even a light tan shows that the skin has been damaged.

What are solariums?
Solariums (also called sunbeds or tanning booths) are fitted with light tubes that release concentrated artificial UV radiation.

Are solariums safe?
Solariums are not a safe way to tan. Just like the sun, solariums release UVA and UVB radiation, which can seriously damage skin, harm your eyes and cause skin cancer.

Tanning in solariums can be especially dangerous as the UV radiation from solariums can be much stronger than the midday summer sun.

The more times you are exposed to UV radiation – whether from sunlight or in a solarium – the greater the damage to your skin and the higher your risk of skin cancer.

Solariums can cause:
- burning, skin irritation, swelling, blistering and pain
- premature ageing of the skin (wrinkles, blotches, skin thickening)
- eye damage, such as cataracts
- skin cancer, including melanoma. Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer and can be fatal if not detected and treated early.

Many Australians still mistakenly believe that a tan is a sign of good health. In reality, a tan is a sign that your skin has been exposed to too much UV radiation and that damage has occurred. Even a light tan shows that the skin has been damaged.

What is UV radiation?
UV radiation is the part of sunlight that causes skin damage, ageing and wrinkling of the skin, eye damage and skin cancer.

The two main types of UV radiation are UVA and UVB. Both UVA and UVB contribute to the risk of skin cancer as well as eye damage and premature ageing of the skin.

What happens to your skin when you tan?
A tan is much more than skin turning brown. Skin cells in the epidermis (the top or outer layer of the skin) produce a pigment called melanin, which gives skin its colour. When skin is exposed to UV radiation, melanin is produced and the skin darkens.
People at higher risk

While UV radiation in solariums can damage all skin types, some people are at even greater risk of harm:

- **Fair-skinned people:** If your skin always burns and never tans, you have type 1 skin. This means you have a high risk of skin cancer and should never use solariums. If you don’t tan when exposed to the sun’s UV rays, you won’t tan in a solarium. People with type 2 skin – those who usually burn and find it difficult to get a tan – are also at higher risk of skin cancer.

- **Young people:** Exposure to UV radiation in the first 15 years of life can greatly increase the risk of developing skin cancer, and people under 15 are banned from using solariums. Studies now show that people under 35 who use a solarium have a significantly increased risk of melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer.

- **People using some cosmetics and medicines:** Some cosmetics and prescription medications (including anti-depressants, antibiotics and drugs for high blood pressure) can make the skin more sensitive to UV radiation, which in a solarium may cause severe sunburn, painful rashes and blotchy patches on the skin.

Considering a solarium

If you are considering using a solarium, or if you use one already, think carefully about all the risks.

The solarium industry is self-regulated. This means that operators are relied on to follow a voluntary code of conduct developed by Standards Australia. There is no way to check if they are doing the right thing. Also, Cancer Council studies have shown that many operators are not complying with the voluntary code.

Under the voluntary code, operators must:

- provide a consent form that describes the risks of solarium use
- complete a skin assessment of all customers
- ask parents of customers under 18 to sign a consent form
- ban people under the age of 15 from using the solarium
- ban people with very fair skin from using the solarium
- not promote a solarium as a ‘healthy’ or ‘safe way to’ tan
- provide protective eye goggles
- maintain strict hygiene and maintenance standards.

Solarium operators should provide you with information outlining the risks. If you are unclear about the risks, or feel uncomfortable with what the operator tells you, we strongly advise that you don’t go ahead.

Further Information

For more information please visit our website: