

Teenage girls aren't the only ones who tan indoors -- older adults do so as well

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Think you won't run into grandparents at your local tanning salon? According to new research, you just might. In fact, a recent health survey of American adults suggests that while 20 percent of 18-39 year olds visited tanning beds, as many as 10 percent of those between 50 and 64 years of age and eight percent of those older than 65 tanned indoors.

Researchers at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia analyzed data about indoor tanning behaviors collected in 2005 as part of an annual health survey called the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). Their findings were published online today in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*.

“Our results are concerning, especially given the increasing rates of skin cancer, including the deadliest form—melanoma,” said Carolyn J. Heckman, Ph.D., a behavioral researcher at Fox Chase. “Ninety percent of all skin cancers are thought to be associated with ultraviolet radiation, which is emitted during indoor tanning. There is a myth that indoor tanning is safer than sunbathing, but this is not the case.”

The 2005 in-home interview of 29,394 adults as part of the NHIS survey included questions about indoor tanning in the previous year. Self-reported indoor tanning declined with increasing age from a high of 20 percent among 18-29 year olds to 8 percent among those 65 years of age and older (17 percent among 30- to 39-year-olds, 14 percent among those aged 40 to 49, 10 percent among those 50 to 64). More of those reporting indoor tanning were females, though the division by gender

was not as great among older adults (age 18-29, 13 percent male and 27 percent female vs. age 65+, 8 percent male and 7 percent female).

“We conducted these analyses because we know little about the prevalence and correlates of indoor tanning among adults,” said Heckman. “Most prior studies have targeted adolescents and young adults. This is the largest study to date investigating indoor tanning in a cohort extending throughout adulthood and we were surprised by how many older adults visit tanning facilities. This is further evidence of the expanding popularity of indoor tanning despite the increased risks for skin cancer.”

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S., accounting for half of all human malignancies. The incidence of skin cancer has been increasing annually for the past four decades, and the incidence of malignant melanoma is increasing faster than any other cancer. Skin cancer can be costly and devastating for both health and appearance.

“While the skin cancer susceptibility of older adults is rooted in the sun exposure of their earlier years, indoor tanning contributes to an individual’s cumulative exposure and increases their skin cancer risk,” added Stuart Lessin, M.D., director of dermatology and the Melanoma Family Risk Assessment Program at Fox Chase.

Other findings from the survey included:

- The most important factors associated with higher indoor tanning rates among those under 50 years of age were being female, Caucasian, and having a higher education level.

- Adults under 50 who tanned indoors were also more likely to report a moderate to high tanning ability, more past year sunburns, and not staying in the shade when outside.

-- Factors found to be independently associated with indoor tanning among those 50 and older were having a greater number of sunburns in the past year and not wearing long pants when outside.

“We hope our findings will help inform the public and health professionals who may think indoor tanning isn’t a concern for adults,” concluded Heckman. “We would also like to see more research conducted in this important area.”

Source: Fox Chase Cancer Center

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