

State policies have little effect on reducing minors' indoor tanning use

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A new analysis finds that state policies meant to limit minors' indoor tanning use have had little effect. Published in the January 15, 2009 issue of *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study indicates that additional efforts are needed to reduce indoor tanning use in youth.

Because indoor tanning use increases an individual's risk of developing skin cancer, a number of states have enacted policies designed to restrict the practice among adolescents. However, nearly every state that has enacted such a policy still permits minors' access with parental consent and/or accompaniment. Few states entirely prohibit access based on age.

To measure the effect of these policies, Vilma Cokkinides, PhD, of the American Cancer Society in Atlanta and colleagues conducted two population-based telephone surveys, one in 1998, and an identical survey in 2004. They surveyed U.S. youth aged 11 to 18 years and their parents or guardians. Participants were asked whether they had used an indoor tanning booth or sunlamp in the past year and the number of times it had been used.

The findings show that the use of indoor tanning by adolescents changed little from 1998 to 2004, increasing from 10 percent in 1998 to 11 percent in 2004. In states with policies on minors' access to indoor tanning, the prevalence of the practice stayed the same or decreased over this period, while it increased in states without such policies, but in both cases the change was not statistically significant.

Results from the surveys also confirmed five factors that were significantly associated with indoor tanning use: older age, being female, having a positive attitude towards a tan, having a parent or guardian who used indoor tanning, and having parents' permission to use indoor tanning.

"These findings underscore the need for significant education at both the individual and community level to change social norms around having a tan and to educate community members about the serious risks of indoor tanning," the authors write. They stress that health professionals and the medical community could play a greater role in providing this education. In addition, the investigators note that more restrictive legislation may be required to reduce adolescents' exposure to indoor tanning.

Source: American Cancer Society

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