

Unfortunately, prom prep often includes trip to tanning salon

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(Medical Xpress) -- Prom season is right around the corner and with that comes dress shopping and trips to the local tanning booths for many girls. Nearly 70 percent of tanning salon patrons are Caucasian girls and women, primarily ages 16-29 years.

"Indoor tanning is a legitimate health problem among this population," said Rebecca Tung, MD, director, Division of Dermatology, Loyola University Health System (LUHS). "When a person visits a tanning booth, the body releases endorphins. These chemicals produce the same feelings of euphoria or well-being that entice drug addicts and alcoholics."

This may explain why the indoor tanning business is booming. Nearly 28 million people visit tanning salons in the United States each year despite the risk for wrinkles and the dangers of ultraviolet radiation. UV rays cause approximately 90 percent of all [skin](#) cancers, and the risk for melanoma increases by 75 percent if you tan indoors.

"People are dying from their obsession with looking tan despite the fact that safe alternatives do exist to get that sun-kissed look," Tung said. "We have to treat excessive tanning like any other addiction and educate young women and men about its dangers. At the state and national level, we as dermatologists continue to push for legislation to ban this potentially deadly practice for young people."

Dawn Meyers, 50, was a self-described sun-worshiper in her 20s. She

spent time in [tanning](#) booths and outside under the sun with no protection from harmful UV rays. This habit came back to haunt her five years ago when precancerous cells were discovered on the tip of her nose and temple.

Doctors treated the precancerous skin with liquid nitrogen. However, just last year, two sores on the tip of Meyers' nose began bleeding regularly. She was busy with work and delayed seeing a dermatologist for several months. When Meyers did schedule an appointment, her fears were confirmed. The diagnosis was skin cancer.

Dr. Tung and her colleagues performed Mohs micrographic surgery on her. The Mohs technique is an advanced outpatient procedure performed under local anesthesia to remove skin cancer. The procedure removes the visible part of the tumor along with a thin layer of normal skin around and below it. The skin sample is analyzed under a microscope for malignant or cancer cells. The process is repeated until all of the cancer is removed.

Because Meyers' cancer had progressed significantly, doctors had to remove a substantial portion of her nose. They worked closely with Loyola's reconstructive surgeons who created a flap to restore the architecture and contour of her nose back to its original shape. Six months after surgery, Meyers now has minimal scarring, and she has regained 95 percent of the feeling in her nose.

Meyers now visits Dr. Tung every six months to monitor her skin for precancerous lesions and early signs of skin cancer. She also has undergone photodynamic therapy as a preventive measure. This technique uses a drug and a light to create oxygen radicals, which kills precancerous cells that may be present in the skin but are not visible to the eye.

Meyers also has reformed her old ways. As an avid gardener, she now uses sunscreen and wears sunglasses, hats, gloves and long sleeves when she goes outside to walk or work in her garden.

“If I could take it back now, I would have worn sunscreen while enjoying the great outdoors,” Meyers said. “It is my job now to use my experience to educate young people about the importance of protecting their skin from the sun.”

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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