

Desire for a tan is making teenage girls ignore sunbed dangers

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Teenage girls desperate for a tan are determined to find ways of getting round the law banning under-18s from using sunbeds, according to a new study from Cancer Research UK published in the *Journal of Public Health*.

During focus groups, 15-18 year old girls who regularly used sunbeds were asked questions that explored their [motivation](#) to use them, their attitudes towards supervision and their knowledge of the health risks. The study found that their desire to get a tan overcame any misgivings about the [potential health risks](#).

Participants said that having a tan made them feel more confident, look healthier and was an important consideration for special events. And when it came to the health risks, most teenagers knew about the potential

dangers but were happy to accept or ignore them.

Dr Jeffrey Lake, public health consultant and lead author of the study, said: "The research shows us that the desire for tanned skin in young people is blinding them to the potential long-term health risks associated with regularly using sunbeds.

"We're finding that their worries are cosmetic when they should really be thinking about the unseen damage they're inflicting on themselves."

In 2010, a [Cancer Research UK study](#) revealed that a quarter of a million children in England between the ages of 11 and 17 were regularly using sunbeds. In 2011, legislation in England and Wales made it [illegal for under 18s to use sunbeds](#).

But the law in England risks falling short because it is difficult to ensure that [tanning salons](#) are supervised by trained staff who can stop teenagers from using potentially harmful equipment and warn customers about [health risks](#).

Catherine Thomson, head of [statistical information](#) at [Cancer Research UK](#) and co-author of the study, said: "It's worrying to see that, in some areas of the UK, half of all 15-17 year old girls are using sunbeds on a regular basis.

"Introducing the legislation banning sunbed use by under 18s was vital to protect younger people from the harmful effects of UV. But proper supervision in salons is essential to combat the determination of teenagers to get round laws that are there for their own protection."

The findings are published just over a week before Cancer Research UK launches its [R UV UGLY?](#) campaign for a second time in England. As part of the campaign, people will be offered free cosmetic skin scans at

skin clinics across the country. Specialist skin-scanning technology will be used to highlight the hidden cosmetic damage lurking beneath the skin's surface, such as pigmentation and premature wrinkles, caused by overexposure to UV both from sunbeds and the sun.

Yinka Ebo, senior health information officer at Cancer Research UK, said: "This study shows that we need to persuade teenagers that damaging their health really isn't justified by the promise of a tan.

"Sunbeds aren't harmless and [research](#) has showed that using them for the first time before the age of 35 increases the risk of developing melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer, by 59 per cent."

More information: Lake, J., Thomson, C., Twelves, C., & Davies, E. (2013). A qualitative investigation of the motivations, experiences and views of female sunbed users under the age of 18 in *England Journal of Public Health* [DOI: 10.1093/pubmed/fds107](https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fds107)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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