Sunbeds blamed for high skin cancer rates in young women in North West of England

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(Medical Xpress)—Rates of the deadliest form of skin cancer are unusually high in young women in the North West of England, with sunbeds and cheap holidays to blame, according to research published today in the *British Journal of Dermatology*.

Historically, incidence of melanoma has always been higher in the more southerly latitudes of England, where the hours of sunshine are longer than in northern regions, especially during the summer season.

However, this latest study has found an alarming reversal in this trend in young women aged 10-29, with the disease for this age group most prevalent in the North West.

A further interesting finding of the study, carried out by researchers at the University of Manchester, relates to the socioeconomic status of melanoma patients. Previous data has long established that the disease is most prevalent in more affluent people, which is largely thought to be due to opportunities for foreign travel to sunnier climates, and other lifestyle factors.

However, among young women in the North, the disease was found to be high among the second most deprived socioeconomic group, as well as the second most affluent groups.

Nina Goad, of the British Association of Dermatologists, said: "This study is interesting as it changes our views on two important risk factors for skin cancer – where we live and how rich we are. Latitudinal position in England has long been associated with risk levels for skin cancer, with southern regions always having the highest rates of the disease. But for young women, the disease is now highest in the North West.

"Previously the disease has consistently been found to be more common amongst the most affluent in society, but in this same group of young women in Northern England, the disease is now also high amongst the most deprived. We know that across England, use of tanning beds is highest among young women in the north and is also high among lower socioeconomic status groups, so this may well be a strong contributing factor to both these findings."

Sarah Wallingford, from the University of Manchester's Institute for Inflammation and Repair who led the research working with colleagues at the University of Manchester's Institute of Cancer Sciences and the Queensland Institute of Medical Research, Brisbane, Australia, concludes: "The affordability of sun holidays and high prevalence of sunbed use among young adults, especially young women living in the north of England, may explain these trends. Recent banning of sunbed

use in those under 18 years of age in the UK should eventually bring a reduction in harmful exposure to artificial UV in the future, however, this regulation will not completely resolve the issue as it applies only to commercial outlets so private use remains unregulated and its effects may continue to be seen. It is important to monitor both UV exposure patterns and melanoma incidence closely in the wake of these trends and the recently implemented legislation."

The study examined diagnoses of melanoma over eleven years (1996 to 2006 inclusive). Melanoma is the least common but most deadly type of skin cancer and the primary cause is exposure to ultraviolet light through sunlight or tanning beds.

Earlier this year, another study in the *British Journal of Dermatology* revealed that nine out of 10 tanning beds in England are breaking safety rules and giving off radiation levels that are up to six times higher than Mediterranean sunlight.

Skin cancer is the UK's most common cancer, with over 100,000 new cases diagnoses annually. Melanoma, the least common but most dangerous form of the disease, accounts for 12,800 of these new cases every year, and 2,700 deaths. In Britain, melanoma incidence rates have more than quadrupled over the last 30 years, and the numbers continue to rise.

Provided by University of Manchester