

Prom prep often includes misguided trip to tanning salon

May 20 2014, by Nora Plunkett

Prom season is right around the corner and with that comes dress shopping and trips to the local tanning salons 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 Wendy Schumacher-Kim, DO, who is with the Pediatric Dermatology team at 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 is felt when people use drugs or alcohol."

This may explain why the [indoor tanning](#) business is booming. Nearly 30 million people use tanning salons in the United States each year and 2.3 million of these are teens who go despite the dangers of ultraviolet radiation and the increased risk for wrinkles later in life. Those who have been exposed to UV radiation from indoor tanning have a reported 59 percent increase in the risk of melanoma, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

"The obsession with looking tan is causing some teenagers to place themselves at risk for skin cancers and premature aging despite the fact that safe sunless tanners exist," said Lily Uihlein, MD, a Loyola pediatric dermatologist. "There also are many misconceptions associated with indoor tanning, which are helping to perpetuate this habit."

Loyola's pediatric dermatologists address the following misconceptions that teen girls may have about indoor tanning:

- Indoor tanning will diminish acne. While acne may temporarily improve with some sun exposure, it tends to flare up after the tan or burn goes away.
- Indoor [tanning salons](#) will prevent a vitamin D deficiency. Vitamin D is manufactured in your skin by exposure to UVB light, and tanning beds predominantly emit UVA light. Plus vitamin D can be obtained through other sources such as supplements and certain foods.
- A base tan prevents sunburns. A tan, whether it comes from the sun or a sunless tanner, does not protect your skin from the harmful effects of the sun. Sunblock is still necessary when you are outdoors.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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