

Children getting burnt on unsupervised sunbeds

June 9 2014

Half of all under-18s who have ever used a sunbed have been burned at least once, according to research presented at Public Health England's annual National Cancer Intelligence Network (NCIN) conference in Birmingham today (Monday).

A national survey of more than 3,000 11–17-year-olds has shown the ban on under-18s from using sunbeds has reduced the number of [children](#) in Great Britain using them, with less than five per cent (4.5) now saying they have used sunbeds compared to nearly seven per cent (6.8) in 2008/9.

But the research, funded by Cancer Research UK and carried out by Public Health England and the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol), has found half of all underage sunbed users say they have been burnt at some point. And the study also shows 100 per cent of children using unsupervised coin-operated sunbeds regularly, have been burnt at least once.

UWE Bristol researchers Katie Collins and Dr Narges Dailami concentrated on gaining access to the information from young people in an ethical way and managed the data collection and compiled the data analysis.

Sunburn is a clear sign the DNA in your cells has been damaged, and over time this can lead to [skin cancer](#). Getting a painful sunburn just once every two years can triple the risk of malignant melanoma – the

most serious form of skin cancer.

Worryingly, more than half (53 per cent) of the children questioned say they have never been asked for ID to prove their age. And four in 10 children say no health advice on the potential harms of sunbeds, or differences between skin types, has ever been given to them.

The ban on under-18s from using sunbeds was introduced in 2009 in Scotland and 2011 in England and Wales, with Wales and Scotland also including measures for all sunbeds to be supervised by trained staff. But many children have side-stepped this by tanning at home or using unstaffed, coin-operated sunbeds.

Professor Julia Verne, lead author and strategic [public health](#) lead of PHE's National Cancer Intelligence Network, said: "The number of children using sunbeds in Great Britain has fallen since the under-18 ban was introduced. But supervision, particularly in England, needs to improve to adhere to the legislation which is designed to protect young people from the harms of UV damage.

"Businesses that fail to check the age of their customers are putting young people at risk of developing skin cancer later in life, as well as breaking the law. We must do more and ensure that clear health information is given to those adults who choose to use them."

Rates of [malignant melanoma](#) in the UK are disproportionately higher in [young people](#) compared to most other cancers, with more than a third of cases diagnosed in the under-55s.

Sara Osborne, Cancer Research UK's head of policy, said: "Cancer Research UK campaigned successfully to introduce the ban on under-18s using sunbeds, so it's encouraging to see fewer children are using them. Rates of skin cancer are disproportionately high in younger people,

which is why it's so important to protect the skin during our early years.

"With many children saying they aren't being told about the risks or asked to prove their age, it's vital the Government takes action to bring England in line with the rest of the UK.

"Cancer Research UK urges people not to use sunbeds for cosmetic reasons and we urge all businesses selling sunbed sessions to show responsibility and ask any customer they suspect is under 18 for proof of identity."

Provided by University of the West of England

Citation: Children getting burnt on unsupervised sunbeds (2014, June 9) retrieved 20 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-06-children-burnt-unsupervised-sunbeds.html>

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