

French health watchdog calls for ban on sunbeds

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The French health watchdog Wednesday urged the government to follow the example of Australia and Brazil by banning sunbeds and tanning parlours because of the "proven" risk of skin cancer caused by exposure to artificial UV light.

"We recommend banning all activities linked to artificial tanning, along with ultraviolet sunlamps sold for esthetic purposes," Olivier Merckel, an expert at the Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety (ANSES), told AFP.

Of 10,722 cases of malignant melanoma—the deadliest form of skin cancer—reported among French adults over age 30 in 2015, 382 could be directly linked to the use of sunbeds and sunlamps, ANSES estimated recently.

Skin specialists, the French academy of medicine, and some politicians have already spoken out in favour of a ban, but the French government so far has only tightened regulations.

France already bans those aged 18 and under from using commercial tanning parlours, and has outlawed advertising for them.

A total ban is now needed, Merckel said.

"Scientific data is growing, there isn't any doubt any more. We have solid proof. The risk of cancer is proven, we have figures on the risk to

young people, to everyone, so now we're calling for action from the authorities," he added.

People under 35 who resort at least once to artificial tanning increase the likelihood of developing skin melanoma by 59 percent, according to ANSES.

Commercial tanning activity in France has already been halved since 2009, according to the National union of tanning professionals which represents some 300 specialised salons and 4,500 beauty parlours offering tanning in the country.

Some 10,000 jobs will go if the government were to follow ANSES' "inept recommendations," it said Wednesday in a statement.

French health and safety inspectors have criticised tanning salons for breaching standards, saying UV emissions on some sunbeds were not regularly checked, while others are operated by untrained staff.

In 2016, 63 percent of the 982 tanning cabins checked by consumer protection authority the DGCCRF were in breach of standards.

There is a "proven" link between artificial sunlight and human cancer, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a body of the World Health Organisation, warned as early as 2009.

Brazil became the first country in the world to ban indoor tanning beds in the same year, followed by Australia as of 2015.

Australia has the highest rate of melanoma in the world with 11,000 cases per year.

The US Food and Drug Administration has so far just insisted that

marketing material for sunlamps must carry health warnings.

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