

# Quarter of a million children in England at risk of skin cancer from sunbeds

12 November 2009

An estimated quarter of a million 11-17 year olds in England are being put at increased risk of developing malignant melanoma by using sunbeds, warn researchers in a letter to this week's *BMJ*.

Catherine Thomson from [Cancer](#) Research UK and Professor Chris Twelves from Leeds Institute of Molecular Medicine & St James's University Hospital in Leeds, say that sunbeds raise serious issues, and they call for urgent legislation to stop [children](#) in England using sunbeds, as is already in place in Scotland and proposed for Wales.

They point to two studies, recently carried out by Cancer Research UK involving over 9000 children aged 11-17 in England.

The first, a national prevalence study of 3101 children, established that 6% of 11-17 year olds had used a sunbed, the average age of first use being just 14. Sunbed use was more common in older children and girls, in the north (11%) compared with the rest of England (4%) and among deprived communities. More than a quarter (26.5%) said that they used a sunbed at least once a month.

In the second study of 6209 children in six cities, sunbed use was highest in Liverpool and Sunderland, reaching 51% and 48% respectively among 15-17 year old girls, with over 40% using them weekly.

Supervision of sunbed use was poor. Nationally, of those children who used sunbeds, 23.2% did so at home. The remaining three quarters had used tanning/beauty salons or gym/leisure centres, where more than one in five (21.8%) had been unsupervised. Only 11.4% of children who were supervised were warned of possible harms.

This rate of sunbed use would lead to more than an estimated quarter of a million 11-17 year olds

being put at increased risk of developing [malignant melanoma](#), say the authors.

National legislation to limit access to sunbed salons to those over 18, and close down unsupervised or coin operated salons, is required to stop more children being put at unnecessary risk of developing skin cancer, they conclude.

Source: British Medical Journal ([news](#) : [web](#))

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