Solariums (sunbeds and tanning beds)

Summary

- A solarium is any tanning unit that uses ultraviolet (UV) radiation to tan the skin. Solariums are also known as sunbeds, sunlamps or tanning beds.
- There is no such thing as a safe tan from a solarium. UV radiation from solariums increases your risk of developing skin cancer. Solariums emit UV levels up to six times stronger than the midday summer sun. They can also cause eye damage and immediate skin damage, such as sunburn, irritation, redness and swelling.
- A solarium tan does not protect your skin from the sun. If you have a solarium tan your skin can still be damaged by the sun's natural UV radiation.

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Commercial solariums were banned in Victorian in 2015.

How UV affects your skin
Skin cells in the top layer of skin (epidermis) make a pigment called melanin. Melanin gives your skin its natural colour. When skin is exposed to UV radiation, it makes more melanin. This causes the skin to darken and tan. A tan is a sign that the skin has been damaged from UV radiation. It is not a sign of good health.

Tanning without burning can still cause skin damage, premature skin ageing and skin cancer. UV radiation can cause permanent DNA damage. Each time you expose your skin to UV radiation you increase your risk of developing skin cancer.

People of all skin types are at risk of skin damage, premature ageing and skin cancer. To get the best protection from UV radiation, use a hat, protective clothing, sunscreen, sunglasses and shade.

Solarium or tanning salon use in Australia
Due to the health risks, commercial tanning units were banned in Victoria in January 2015. This ban was the result of almost a decade of ongoing campaigning led by Cancer Councils and partners. The result of this work is that many Victorians will be saved from the devastating effects that skin cancer has on people and their families.

Before the ban, it was estimated that each year in Australia, solarium use led to:
- 281 new melanoma cases
- 43 melanoma-related deaths, and
- 2,572 new cases of squamous cell carcinoma.

Commercial solarium operators are also banned in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and Western Australia. There are no commercial solariums operating in the Northern Territory.

To report the unlawful use of tanning units being used for commercial purposes, or for further queries about solarium legislation in Victoria, contact the Department of Health and Human Services Radiation Safety Team on 1300 767 469 or email radiation.safety@dhhs.vic.gov.au.
A solarium tan is not a safe tan

There is no such thing as a safe tan from a solarium. It is a myth that using a solarium is a safe way to tan and protects your skin from burning in the sun. Solarium tans offer no protection against DNA damage to skin cells, which can occur without any visible signs of skin damage.

Research shows that using a solarium increases your risk of skin cancer. It also causes premature ageing of the skin. If you use a solarium, you have a 20 per cent greater risk of melanoma than those who don't. Your melanoma risk rises to 59 per cent if you started using a solarium before you were 35 years of age. The risk of melanoma from solarium use also increases with more frequent use.

The risk of developing other skin cancers is also increased. Using a solarium increases the risk of developing squamous cell carcinoma by 67 per cent and basal cell carcinoma by 29 per cent, when compared to people who have never used a solarium.

Get to know your skin

If you have previously used a solarium, your risk of skin cancer will be higher. Get to know your skin and go to the doctor as soon as possible if you notice any new or unusual spots or changes to an existing spot. You may also want to talk to your doctor about developing a surveillance plan.

Read more about how to check for skin cancer.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Your **pharmacist**
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** Tel. **1300 60 60 24** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Cancer Council** Tel. **13 11 20** for information and support.
- **Cancer support in your own language**, Cancer Council Tel. **13 14 50**
- **Department of Health and Human Services Radiation Safety Team**, Victorian Government Tel. **1300 767 469**

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