

Solariums

Skin cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in Australia. More than 430,000 Australians are treated a year for skin cancers. Of these, over 10,500 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed. Each year there are around 1600 deaths from melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer. Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world.



The major cause of skin cancer is too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. Skin can burn in as little as 15 minutes in the summer sun so it is important to protect your skin from UV radiation.

Avoid using solariums or sunbeds, which emit harmful levels of UV radiation up to five times as strong as the summer midday sun. Many Australian's still mistakenly believe that a tan is a sign of good health and that solariums are a safer way to tan than the sun. Whether you're lying on the beach or in a solarium, there is no such thing as a safe way to tan. If you're considering visiting a solarium, its important to know the risks.

Key points

- Ultraviolet radiation, whether from the sun or a solarium, damages the skin and increases the risk of skin cancer
- Solariums can emit UV radiation that is up to five times as strong as the midday summer sun
- Some people go to a solarium for a 'healthy tan', but a tan is a sign that your skin has been exposed to too much UV radiation
- Solariums are not a 'safe' or 'controlled' way to tan
- Using a solarium even for a short time can greatly increase your risk of skin cancer
- The Cancer Council does not support tanning solariums under any circumstances.

What is UV radiation?

UV radiation is the part of sunlight that causes skin damage, ageing and wrinkling of the skin, eye damage and skin cancer.

The two main types of UV radiation are UVA and UVB. UVA can cause skin damage and premature ageing, while UVB

can cause sunburn, eye damage and skin cancer.

What happens to your skin when you tan?

A tan is much more than skin turning brown. Skin cells in the epidermis (the top or outer layer of the skin) produce a pigment called melanin, which gives its colour. When skin is exposed to UV radiation, melanin is produced and the skin darkens.

Some people think that a tan is a sign of good health. In reality, a tan is a sign that your skin has been exposed to too much UV radiation and that damage has occurred. Even a light tan shows that the skin has been damaged.

What are solariums?

Solariums (also called sunbeds or tanning booths) are fitted with light tubes that release concentrated artificial radiation.

Are solariums safe?

Solariums are not a safe way to tan. Just like the sun, solariums release UVA and UVB radiation which can seriously damage skin, harm your eyes and cause skin cancer.

Tanning in solariums can be especially dangerous as the UV radiation from solariums can be five times as strong as the midday summer sun.

Some people use solariums to tan in the mistaken belief that it will reduce their risk of developing skin cancer from the sun's UV rays. This is not true—a tan doesn't protect you against skin cancer.

The more times you are exposed to UV radiation—whether from sunlight or in a solarium—the greater the damage to your skin the higher your risk of skin cancer.



Solariums can cause:

- Burning, skin irritation, swelling, blistering and pain
- Premature ageing of the skin (wrinkles, blotches, skin thickening)
- Eye damage, such as cataracts
- Skin cancer, including melanoma, which is the most serious form of skin cancer and can be fatal if not detected and treated early.

People who are at increased risk

While UV radiation in solariums can damage all skin types, some people are at even greater risk of harm:

- **Fair-skinned people:** If your skin always burns and never tans, you have type 1 skin. This means you have a high risk of skin cancer and should never use solariums. If you don't tan when exposed to the sun's UV rays, you won't tan in a solarium.
- **Young people:** Exposure to UV radiation in the first 15 years of life can greatly increase the risk of developing skin cancer. Studies have shown that people under 35 who use a solarium have a significantly increased risk of melanoma.
- **People using some cosmetics and medicines:** Some cosmetics and prescription medications (including anti-depressants, antibiotics and drugs for high blood pressure) can make the skin more sensitive to UV radiation, which in a solarium may cause severe sunburn, painful rashes and blotchy patches on the skin.

If you decide to use a solarium

Think carefully about all the risks when considering using a solarium. Solarium operators should provide you with information outlining the risks. If you are

unclear about the risks, or feel uncomfortable with what the operator tells you, we strongly advise that you don't go ahead.

For further information go to Cancer Council Australia's Position Statement on Solariums:

<http://www.cancer.org.au/Healthprofessionals/PositionStatements/sunsmart/solariums.htm>

