



# POSITION STATEMENT

## FAKE TANS

The Cancer Council Australia does not encourage fake tans or the use of fake tanning products, as it perpetuates the perception that tanning is desirable. However if people choose to tan their skin, the use of a fake tanning product is a safer alternative to sunbathing or the use of a solarium.

Some people who use fake tans mistakenly believe that a tan will provide them with protection against ultraviolet (UV) radiation. As a result, they may not take appropriate sun protection measures, putting them at greater risk of skin cancer.

### Recommendations

1. The Cancer Council Australia does not encourage fake tans or support the use of fake tanning products.
2. People who have a strong desire to change their skin colour should choose a fake tanning product in preference to UV radiation (direct sunlight or solarium).
3. Fake tanning product users should continue to protect their skin by:
  - Taking particular care to cover up between 10am and 3pm,
  - Wearing a broad brimmed hat, sun protective clothing, sunglasses and seeking shade,
  - Using broad spectrum SPF 30+, water resistant sunscreen.

### Fake tanning products

There is a wide range of fake tanning products promoted commercially.

#### *Lotions – skin dyes*

Fake tanning lotions, sprays and creams contain dihydroxyacetone (DHA), a chemical or vegetable dye that temporarily stains the skin, giving a tanned appearance. The dye binds to the skin and comes off when the dead skin cells flake off. They offer no protection against UV radiation. Although some brands include a sunscreen, they do not provide adequate protection from UV radiation.

### *Tablets*

There are also tablets (taken by mouth) commercially available. The tablets contain beta-carotene, a Vitamin A related chemical responsible for the orange colour of a number of orange fruit and vegetables. These tablets produce an orange skin colour that may remain for several weeks on the palms and soles after use of the tablets has stopped. The tablets offer no protection from UV radiation.

### **Limited sun protection from fake tans**

The Cancer Council Australia is concerned fake tanning product users assume they are protected from the sun when using any of these products. A survey conducted by The Cancer Council South Australia in 2001 showed fake tan users were more likely to report having been sunburnt more than once over the summer compared with non-users. (Beckmann et al 2001).

A telephone survey conducted in NSW in 2003 to assess community attitudes and practices in relation to fake tanning lotions suggests that fake tanning lotions are not likely to be used as a safer alternative to sun tanning. (Girgis et al 2003)

The Cancer Council strongly recommends that people using a fake tanning product protect themselves when outdoors with SPF30+ broad spectrum sunscreen, a shady hat, sunglasses and protective clothing if they are going to be exposed to UV radiation.

### **Further information about tanning, sun protection and skin cancer contact:**

- The Cancer Council Australia – [www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au)
- The Cancer Council's Cancer Helpline – 13 11 20
- Your state/territory cancer organisation
- Australasian College of Dermatologists – [www.dermcoll.asn.au](http://www.dermcoll.asn.au)

See also The Cancer Council Australia's position statement on solarium use.

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### **References**

Beckmann KR et al, Use of fake tanning lotions in the South Australian population *Medical Journal of Australia* 2001; Vol 174: 75-78

Chapman S. Faking it: should cancer control agencies promote 'fake' tanning lotions? *Medical Journal of Australia* 1999; Vol 170: 603-604

Girgis A. et al Australians' use of fake tanning lotions: another piece of the puzzle. *Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 2003, Oct;27(5):529-32