

New guidelines for talking to kids about tanning

By ACSH Staff — May 10, 2012

Last week, Patricia Krentcil made headlines as the tan-a-holic mother of four who was accused of taking her 5-year-old daughter into a tanning booth, where the child allegedly suffered from severe burns. Aside from eliciting disgust from parents across the country for mistreating her child, Krentcil who admitted to tanning at a salon almost every day mostly just scared people with her [photos](#) [1], which show a 44-year-old woman with leathery skin who has an uncanny resemblance to a burnt piece of toast.

Perhaps, then, it's quite fitting that, amid the tanning uproar, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) is now calling on doctors to counsel children, adolescents, and young adults with fair skin on the harmful effects of exposure to UV radiation. Published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, the latest [draft guidelines](#) [2] will replace a 2003 statement that declared there was insufficient evidence to recommend for or against counseling. Maybe Ms. Krentcil's recent celebrity status helped tip the balance.

Unlike PFCs or BPA, UV radiation is an actual carcinogen responsible for many types of skin cancers, including life-threatening melanoma, which causes about 9,000 deaths in the U.S. annually. But teenagers are typically not deterred from risky behavior when presented with what can be described as dry statistics. That's why doctors are appealing to their vanity instead: Using UV cameras, physicians can take pictures of the face and skin, which will reveal the damage UV rays can do, especially in terms of aging and wrinkles.

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, for one, is quite pleased with the latest guidelines. I don't think most physicians bring up the issue of tanning during routine visits, she says. Maybe it's because they think that most people already know about the risks, but that's not necessarily true. We could all use a reminder especially young adults, since exposure to the sun is particularly dangerous at their age. (In fact, new [research](#) [3] published last month suggested that the habit of tanning at that age significantly increases the risk of skin cancer in adulthood.)

However, the new recommendations don't mean that you should avoid the sun at all costs. In fact, sunlight helps to augment the body's production of vitamin D, an important nutrient. Just make sure that when you do go outside, Dr. Whelan reminds us, you have on plenty of protective sunblock.

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[1] http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504083_162-57431758-504083/tanning-mom-patricia-krentcil-banned-from-over-60-tanning-salons-report-says/

[2] <http://blogs.wsj.com/health/2012/05/07/doctors-urged-to-council-young-people-on-suns-dangers/>

[3] http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsid.3343/news_detail.asp