FDA Seeks Ban on Indoor Tanning for All Minors

By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — December 22, 2015

[1]In a sweeping move that's likely to bring major change in the fight against skin cancer, the Food and Drug Administration has proposed a ban on indoor tanning in the United States for those under the age of 18. The potential measure adds further support to the already well-known hazards of indoor tanning, with melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancers, being the most concerning.

The skin cancer kills roughly 9,500 Americans each year, with new cases increasing at a rate of about 3 percent annually in white women ages 15 to 39. Health experts warn that tanning beds still a very concerning trend among the youth are very much to blame.

The proposal comes after decades of data stacking up against the popular practice, with the most recent review showing that tanning beds account for nearly 400,000 cases of skin cancer in the U.S. each year. That includes 6,000 cases of melanoma, which unlike most cancers that have been declining or plateauing has been on the rise since 1992.

As many as 40 states across the U.S. have already adopted some form of restriction on tanning for minors. But if a national measure is adopted, it would restrict service in areas where the practice is widely popular, like gyms, shopping malls and college campuses. Currently there are at least 11 states Texas, Hawaii, Louisiana and Illinois among them with full-on bans for teenagers under 18, according to AIM, a foundation that tracks the disease.

The FDA’s proposal will be open for public comment for 90 days.

The agency's position is quite significant, as young people are the most at risk from the health detriments of indoor tanning. The risk of skin cancer jumps by almost 60 percent in those who use tanning beds before the age of 35. Though the rates of minors tanning has declined slightly over the years, the numbers are still extremely high about 1.6 million minors frequent a tanning salon each year. What's more, according to previous research, in some cases tanning may be classified as an addiction. In the U.S. about one third of adults have reported using a tanning bed at least once, most of them women.

The agency currently requires tanning bed manufacturers to register all beds, but since tanning salons are not required to do so enforcing the laws could be tricky, warn experts at the FDA. The
agency is also requiring that tanning bed companies make warning labels more prominent and easier to read.

"It's impossible to really know the extent of the danger from UV exposure via tanning beds, for any specific age group, gender, or in general. And it's too easy to simply dictate a ban based upon supposition, as in, 'Well, I don't see any benefits to it, and even if the danger is exaggerated, I don't care: let's not take any chances,"" said the American Council's Dr. Gil Ross. "That is wrong as a basis for public policy. That being said, I'm convinced by the semi-quantitative evidence we do have, that the risks of tanning beds for young people justify this FDA move, and I agree with it."

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