



## TANNING LAMPS

### The Issue

Exposure to ultraviolet A and B radiation can cause sunburn, damage to your eyes, and other health effects, including an increased risk of skin cancer. If you choose to use tanning lamps, you should be aware of the hazards involved so you can take steps to minimize your risk.

### Background

There are many different brands and models of tanning lamps on the market in Canada. They must all comply with federal regulations under the Radiation Emitting Devices Act. The regulations cover a wide range of safety issues, including requirements for warning labels. Anyone who uses tanning lamps, either at home or in a salon, should look for these labels on the equipment. Warning labels list the recommended exposure times per session for different skin types, and also contain other information that can help enhance safety during exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation.

It is important to make an informed decision about how long and how often you are exposed to UV radiation from tanning lamps. If you exceed the recommended exposure time for your skin type, or use tanning lamps more often than recommended, your risk of adverse health effects will increase.

Health Canada has published Guidelines for Tanning Salon Owners, Operators and Users, which explain the risks and effects of tanning lamps and how to use them in a safer way.

### Health Risks Associated with Tanning Lamps

People who use tanning lamps are at risk of sunburn. This inflamed redness of the skin is caused by too much exposure to UV radiation, particularly to ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation. Sunburn may show up right away in severe cases, or may develop up to 24 hours later.

If you do not protect your eyes while tanning, overexposure to UV radiation can also cause temporary but painful eye conditions known as photokeratitis and photoconjunctivitis. In particular, overexposure to UVB radiation may be linked to the development of cataracts, a clouding over of the lens of the eye, which can cause blindness.

Tanning lamps can also cause longer-term health effects. Exposure to UV radiation can cause your skin to age more quickly and can increase your risk of developing squamous and basal cell skin cancer. Your risk of developing skin cancer increases with accumulated exposure to UV radiation. There is also scientific evidence that exposure to UV radiation weakens the immune system. This could affect your body's ability to defend against serious illnesses, including the more serious form of skin cancer, malignant melanoma.

### Minimizing Your Risk

There are many factors to consider before choosing to use tanning lamps. For example, people with fair skin or a history



of sunburn are at greater risk for adverse effects. Also, some medications and cosmetics can make your skin more sensitive to UV radiation. Talk to your health care professional about your personal risk factors before you decide whether to use tanning lamps.

If you decide to go ahead, the following steps will help minimize your risk:

- Read the warning labels on the sunlamp or tanning bed you are using and follow the directions carefully.
- If you go to a tanning salon, discuss your skin's sensitivity and your ability to tan with the salon operator. This should help the operator recommend the amount of time for your tanning session and how frequently you should tan.
- Do not exceed the recommended time per tanning session for your skin type.
- Allow at least 48 hours between each tanning session. This will give your skin a chance to repair damage from the UV radiation and may slow down the aging effects caused by the exposure.
- Always wear the safety eye-wear that is recommended for the type of lamp you are using.
- Be sure there is a physical barrier, such as a clear sheet of acrylic, between you and the tanning lamp. This will help prevent heat burns from the lamp.
- Report any adverse reaction, such as sunburn or itchiness, to the salon operator. In cases

of severe sunburn, see your health care professional.

Do not use tanning lamps more often than is necessary to maintain the colour of tan you want. Health Canada advises tanning lamp users to limit their total number of tanning sessions per year. Remember, the less ultraviolet radiation you get, the better it is for your health.

Get a copy of Health Canada's Guidelines for Tanning Salon Owners, Operators and Users and read it carefully. It contains additional information to help you protect and maintain your health.

## Health Canada's Role

Health Canada analyzes and manages health risks related to ultraviolet radiation. As part of this work, Health Canada writes regulations for tanning lamps and monitors equipment compliance under the Radiation Emitting Devices Act. In addition to publishing the Guidelines for Tanning Salon Owners, Operators and Users.

## Need More Info?

For a copy of Guidelines for Tanning Salon Owners, Operators and Users, write to:  
Health Canada, Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch  
Consumer and Clinical Radiation Protection Bureau, Lasers and Electro-Optics Division,  
775 Brookfield Road  
Ottawa, ON, K1A1C1

Or visit:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/ccrpb/publication/02hecs288/toc.htm>

You can also call Health Canada Publications at (613) 954-5995

For more information on tanning, see Tanning Under Lights, an information sheet Health Canada's Radiation Protection Bureau at:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/ccrpb/00ehd240.htm>

For related information about protection from solar UV radiation, see the following It's Your Health articles:

Ultraviolet Radiation  
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/environment/ultraviolet.html>

Preventing Skin Cancer  
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/iyh/diseases/cancer.html>

Additional It's Your Health articles can be found at:

[www.healthcanada.ca/iyh](http://www.healthcanada.ca/iyh)  
You can also call (613) 957-2991