

Solarium Tanning

What is a solarium?

A solarium is also known as a sunbed, sun tanning unit, sunlamp, tanning bed, or tanning booth. It is a device that uses electricity to produce concentrated ultraviolet (UV) radiation to tan the skin.

Tanning happens more rapidly from a solarium compared to sun tanning because of the high intensity of the UV radiation emitted.

What is ultraviolet (UV) radiation?

UV radiation is the part of sunlight that is responsible for sunburn, skin cancer, eye damage, ageing and wrinkling of the skin. Solariums may emit levels of UV radiation up to three times as strong as the summer midday sun. However a 2008 study found that 15% of tanning beds exceeded this level and some emitted up to 6 times more UVA than summer sun.

The two main types of UV radiation emitted by a solarium are UVA and UVB. UVA radiation may cause premature ageing of the skin, wrinkles, blotchiness, unusual pigmentation, skin cancer and eye damage. UVB radiation may cause sunburn, skin ageing, skin cancers and eye damage.

Is it safe to use a solarium?

All solarium use carries a risk. The link between UV radiation and skin cancer is well established. Exposing your skin to UV radiation produced by a solarium increases your risk of developing skin cancer, eye cancers and other skin and eye damage.

In 2006 an International Working Group set up by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) assessed the available evidence relating to health effects of exposure to artificial UV radiation through the use of solariums and found:

- People who had ever used solariums had a 15% increased risk of developing malignant melanoma (the most dangerous type of skin cancer).
- People who had ever used solariums have an increased risk of squamous cell carcinoma (a type of non-melanoma skin cancer).

As a result of the findings from the Working Group, IARC includes ultra-violet emitting tanning beds in its highest cancer risk category and labels them as 'carcinogenic to humans'.

A separate review of the evidence in 2012 also showed that people who used a solarium before the age of 35 had a 59% increased risk of developing melanoma.

If you are determined to change the colour of your skin, fake tan is the best option. However, remember that no tan (real or fake) provides adequate protection from the sun.

Ban of commercial solarium

In April 2015 the Western Australian Minister for Health, Dr Kim Hames, announced a ban on the commercial use of solarium in Western Australia. The ban was in response to clear evidence of health risks associated with solarium.

The changes to regulations to introduce the ban were published in the Western Australian Government Gazette on 9 October 2015, and the ban came into effect on 1 January 2016.

Commercial solarium is now banned in all Australian States and Territories, except for the Northern Territory where there are no commercial solarium in operation.