

Protect Youth from Excessive UV Radiation

The Issue:

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in Canada. Over-exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) is the major cause of skin cancer (the International Agency for Research on Cancer).

In 2008, we estimate that 73,000 Canadians will be diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer, and 4,600 Canadians (740 British Columbians) will be diagnosed with malignant melanoma (Canadian Cancer Statistics, 2008). Skin cancer is one of the most costly cancers to treat, due to its prevalence and requirements for follow-up care (Lynn From, MD, FRCPC, at the CPAC National Skin Cancer Prevention Committee Consultation, May 2008).

Over-exposure to sun in childhood and adolescence plays an important role in the subsequent development of skin cancer. The lifetime risk of getting skin cancer is linked to sun exposure in childhood. People who have had more than one blistering sunburn during childhood or adolescence are two times more likely to develop melanoma than those without (Glanz, Saraiya, & Wechsler, 2002).

Despite 10 years of 'sun safety' messages, Canadians' sun protective behaviours have not changed appreciably (Second National Sun Survey, 2006). Telling people to seek shade, wear sun protective clothing, apply sunscreen, and avoid tanning salons has not worked. This signifies a need for legislation and healthy public policies to encourage sun-safe behaviours.

Australia has had a number of public policies in place for the past two years, including a national mass media campaign, tanning salon legislation, mandatory shade structures, and rebates for outdoor workers' sun protection materials. Since then, there have been 20,000 less cases of melanoma and 49,000 less cases of non-melanoma skin cancer per year (Craig Sinclair, Cancer Council Victoria).

ACTIONS REQUIRED:

The Canadian Cancer Society is calling on all political parties to make a commitment to:

a) Implement legislation banning those under the age of 18 from using artificial tanning equipment

- Both the World Health Organization and the Medical Health Officers Council of British Columbia have made this recommendation in the past.
- Tanning equipment is a source of UVR, and exposure to sunlamps or sunbeds is a human carcinogen. Use of artificial tanning equipment increases the risk of skin cancer (See: Gallagher RP, Spinelli J, Lee TK, *Tanning beds, sunlamps and risk of cutaneous malignant melanoma*, Cancer Epi Biomarkers Prevention 2005; 14: 562-6). In the US, there are as many tanning salons as there are Starbucks (from courant.com September 17, 2006).

- According to the World Health Organization, as long as tanning beds are available to the public, there is a need for guidelines or legislation to reduce the risks associated with their use. In countries where voluntary industry codes of practice exist, the tanning salon owners have generally not shown significant capacity to self regulate effectively, as was recently demonstrated by the Survey conducted for the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division, which found that artificial tanning facilities in Toronto are not following Health Canada's voluntary safety guidelines, including those related to the protection of under-aged youth.
- Tanning salon bans for children are in place in a number of US States, the Australian States of Victoria and South Australia, the Countries of Scotland and France, and the province of New Brunswick.

b) Implement minimum standards for adequate shade – whether natural or constructed - protection in all child care facilities and schools

- Children generally spend more time outside than adults, and should be protected from UVR. Childcare facilities and schools are required to provide a safe environment for the children in their care. These requirements should include protecting them against over-exposure to UVR—a known human carcinogen.
- Educational and policy approaches to sun-safety in primary schools – i.e. providing sunscreens, shade, or playtime before or after peak intensity of the sun – have been shown to be effective.

