

FDA Bans Tanning of Youth's Hides

By Reg P. Wydeven
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In past articles I've written about my buddies and me using a tanning bed to get a 'base tan' before going to Panama City for Spring Break in 1995. The plan worked pretty well, because I only got moderately sunburned when we were there, as opposed to severely burned. Only Tree's calves got burned as he was too tall for the tanning bed.

That was my one and only tanning bed experience. In hindsight, I maybe could have snuck in a few sessions prior to our wedding. When people look through our photo album, they ask why the photographer would use a flash outside, but then I just have to explain that the glare is actually caused by the sun off my face.

Because of the government's warnings about the dangers of tanning beds, however, I'm glad I didn't spend much time in them.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is so concerned about the hazards of tanning beds, the agency introduced proposed rules last month that would ban anyone under the age of 18 from using a sunlamp or indoor tanning device. In addition, the new regulations would also require anyone over the age of 18 to sign a certification indicating they understand the risks, such as skin cancer and severe burns, prior to using a tanning salon or other similar product.

Tanning beds and sunlamps fall under the FDA's jurisdiction because they are considered medical devices. The agency already requires the manufacturers of tanning beds and sunlamps to carry a "black-box" warning saying they should not be used by people under 18. The new rules would further require manufacturers to make these labels more prominent and make other safety modifications to them, including adding a "panic" button to allow the lamp to be turned off.

Many compare the FDA's new rules to the regulation of tobacco. Like with cigarettes, people would now need to show an ID to tan. Also, the FDA has been diligent in trying to educate the public, especially youth, about the dangers of cigarette alternatives, such as flavored tobacco, hookahs and electric or vapor cigarettes. Similarly, many people, again especially youth, believe that tanning beds are a safer alternative to the sun.

Dr. Vasum Peiris, chief medical officer in the FDA's division that regulates medical devices for children, says that myth couldn't be further from the truth. He told reporters that, "Indoor tanning is designed to deliver large amounts of UV (ultraviolet) radiation in a short time," and that some lamps can deliver 10 to 15 times the intensity of the midday sun.

The FDA has decided on how it would enforce the rules, which would apply to the manufacturers of sunlamps and tanning beds and to tanning facility operators. The agency is considering seizing products that don't meet standards and working with the Justice Department, state and local government and other agencies to bring civil and criminal charges against repeat offenders.

Thirteen states and Washington, D.C. already ban minors from using tanning salons and booths. Wisconsin bans anyone under the age of 16 from using them.

The public now has 90 days to comment on the proposed rules. Not surprisingly, the American Cancer Society and the American Academy of Dermatology support the measures, while the Indoor Tanning Association opposes them.

I just make my kids wear hoodies and sweatpants to the beach.

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