RESEARCH SHEDS LIGHT ON PARENTS’ VIEWS OF INDOOR TANNING
Fathers, tanners more likely to have favorable attitudes toward children’s tanning bed use

SAN DIEGO (Feb. 16, 2018) — While everyone who climbs into an indoor tanning bed faces an increased risk of skin cancer, this risk is especially pronounced for young people: Using indoor tanning beds before age 35 can increase one’s risk of melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, by 59 percent, and this risk increases with each use.¹-⁴

“Minors are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of indoor tanning,” says board-certified dermatologist Maryam Asgari, MD, MPH, FAAD, an associate professor in the department of dermatology at Massachusetts General Hospital and the department of population medicine at Harvard Medical School in Boston. “If you use a tanning device early in life, you’re more likely to develop skin cancer later in life, your skin could age prematurely, and you may even develop a tanning addiction. The best way to avoid these risks is to never start tanning in the first place.”

According to a 2017 study, 45 percent of those who start tanning before age 16 do so with a family member.⁵ To investigate parents’ attitudes toward their children’s tanning behaviors, Dr. Asgari and a team of researchers from Massachusetts General conducted a national survey of 1,205 parents of children age 11-17. The team presented their results at the American Academy of Dermatology 2018 Annual Meeting in San Diego.

The survey responses indicated that fathers, parents who had used indoor tanning devices themselves and those who reported that they had never received skin cancer prevention counseling from their child’s doctor were less likely to believe adolescent indoor tanning was harmful. This view was also more common among parents of males, older adolescents (16- and 17-year-olds) and adolescents whose skin was less reactive to the sun.

“Parents who have never seen their children get sunburned or discussed skin cancer prevention with a doctor may not be aware of the dangers of unprotected exposure to ultraviolet light,” Dr. Asgari says. “Since mothers are often the ones to take their children to the doctor, fathers may be less likely to receive skin cancer prevention counseling from their child’s provider.”

“While it’s not surprising that parents who have tanned themselves would have favorable attitudes toward their children’s indoor tanning, it’s important for all parents to understand the dangers of tanning at a young age and communicate those dangers to their children,” Dr. Asgari adds. “If you avoid tanning beds, especially when you’re young, you can reduce your risk of skin cancer and early skin aging in the future.”

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More Information

Correlates of positive parental attitudes toward indoor tanning
Indoor tanning fact sheet
SPOT Skin Cancer

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