

# News From...



The Australasian College of Dermatologists

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## **‘THE DREAD OF THE SUNBED’ – Australian Dermatologists back World Health Organisation warning**

Australia’s leading professional organisation for the diagnosis and treatment of all skin diseases, the Australasian College of Dermatologists (ACD), has fully endorsed the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) condemnation of sunbed use by anyone under the age of 18.

Young people who get burnt from exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UV) have a far greater risk of developing potentially deadly melanoma later in life, and recent international studies demonstrate the direct link between the use of sunbeds and cancer.

The Honorary Secretary of the ACD, Dr Stephen Shumack, says that while the WHO statistics show an estimated 132,000 cases of malignant melanoma (the most deadly form of skin cancer) annually around the world – and 66,000 deaths from them – the Australian statistics are by far the worst in the world.

“In Australia, we are in the midst of a skin cancer crisis on a scale never before seen in this country,” says Dr Shumack.

“We have more than 8,500 new cases of melanoma diagnoses each year, far higher per capita than any other country on earth.

“Young people, particularly throughout the Western World, continue to equate a tan with something fashionable and glamorous, but I can think of few things less glamorous than a premature death from melanoma,” says Dr Shumack.

The rapid growth in suntanning centres, using artificial UV exposure via sunbeds, is seen by the ACD to be one of the most dangerous trends ever to emerge in the ongoing battle against skin cancer.

WHO Assistant Director-General for Environmental Health, Dr Kerstin Leitner, is urging governments around the world to adopt stricter controls on the use of sunbeds.

“Some sunbeds have the capacity to emit levels of ultraviolet radiation many times stronger than the midday sun,” says Dr Leitner.

In addition to deadly melanomas, UV exposure can also cause severe eye damage, reduced effectiveness of the body’s immune system and, ironically - given the so-called “fashionableness” of a suntan among the young - premature skin ageing.

Dr Shumack says those who are more interested in the short-term appearance of a suntan than the long-term health of their bodies run the very real risk of becoming another deadly statistic as melanoma deaths soar throughout the world, but particularly in Australia.

“Possibly the weirdest irony in all of this is the perception that a suntanned body is healthy, fit and eternally youthful when the direct result of that tan is likely to cause the exact opposite,” says Dr Shumack.

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