

Talking Points for Salon Owners

Your customers may have seen recent news stories claiming that scientists say tanning beds are “as dangerous as arsenic,” or comparing indoor tanning to smoking tobacco. These stories are inaccurate and misleading, and are based on a misunderstanding of the actual research. We have prepared a brief guide for you, to help you answer any questions and concerns your clients may have.

What the news means:

- Tanning beds have been categorized as “Group 1” by a group of scientists in France. “Group 1” means there is evidence that the use of tanning beds can increase the risk of skin cancer.
- The information is not new at all: sunlight is in the same category as now tanning beds, and has been in that category since 1992!
- Since 1992, thousands of doctors have recommended moderate exposure to sunlight for a variety of health benefits. In fact, a lot of prominent Vitamin D experts are convinced that the benefits of sunlight outweigh the risks by far.
- Being in the “Group 1” category does not say anything about the **size** of the risk, just that there is **any** risk at all. Some things in the category are very dangerous, like arsenic and mustard gas. Other substances only carry a very small risk, like red wine, beer, and salted fish.
- News stories that say things like “tanning is as dangerous as arsenic” are flat-out wrong. The scientists have not made that kind of comparison at all, only reporters looking for a scary headline.
- The report itself has not been made available. All the news stories are working off of a press release, and no reporters have actually read the report!
- The IARC is a group of scientists that works with the United Nations. Their report is not a new study; it is a review of a paper from 2006, which itself was a review of 23 studies, some dating to the early 1980s. Those studies had a wide range of findings.
 - Of the 23 studies:
 - 5 were excluded for unusable data
 - 6 had results suggesting that tanning beds actually reduce the risk of skin cancer!
 - 16 had results within the margin of error – In an election experts will say that you shouldn’t trust a poll that shows one candidate ahead by 1%, with a margin of error of 5%.
- Some news stories are including a misleading statistic: that tanning beds increase the risk of melanoma by 75%. This number comes from a study with questionable methods. The study’s authors admit that they did not adjust for factors like outside sun exposure and sun sensitivity. Even if the study is accurate, it does **not** mean that 75% of tanning bed users will get melanoma, it means that their relative risk is higher. Because the issue is **relative** risk, when the original risk is very small, a percentage increase that looks big actually translates into a very small added risk. To use another example, your annual risk of a fatal car accident is about 0.013%. If that risk were increased by 75%, it would be 0.023%, or about 1 in 4,500. This to put that percentage number into perspective!

We hope the above points will help in explaining the background to your customers!