

Tanning under lights

It might surprise you to know...

...There is no safe way to tan!

Tanning devices such as tanning beds and sun lamps release ultraviolet rays, or UV ray, just like the sun. Tanning devices expose you to radiation of UV A and UV B rays. When we expose our skin to UV rays too much or too often, it can lead to a number of health problems.

Health risks common to tanning

You should know about the risks of tanning so you can choose wisely.

Sunburn

When the skin is not thick enough, to protect itself from the UV rays, it can get red, sore, or blister. This can happen right away or it can take up to 24 hours to appear.

Premature aging

UV rays can cause skin to age faster than normal.

- The skin wrinkles a lot sooner than expected.
- The skin becomes waxy or look like leather.
- The skin loses its ability to return to normal after being stretched, resulting in sagging skin.

Skin cancers

UV rays can increase your chances of getting a skin cancer. Skin cancer is one of the most common and a cancer you can prevent.

A person is 3 times more likely to get skin cancer from using a tanning device when they start using it before the age of 35.

Infections

You can get an infection when tanning beds and reusable protective eyewear are not disinfected correctly between uses. Unclean eyewear can cause eye infections such as “pink eye”. Unclean tanning bed surfaces can cause skin infections.

Allergic reactions

People who are sensitive to the sun’s UV rays might have signs of an allergic reaction, such as an itchy red rash.



Eye damage

Repeatedly exposing your eyes to UV rays either directly or indirectly can cause eye damage. It is not enough to close your eyes while tanning.

Damage can be temporary or permanent. Examples of eye damage:

- painful injuries to parts of the eye (cornea, conjunctiva, and retina)
Common injuries – “welder’s flash” and “snow blindness”
- Eye lenses turn brown, making it harder to see clearly
- Eye lenses no longer able to change shape (loss of elasticity), making it hard to focus on close objects
- Cataracts and eye cancer can lead to blindness

Where do these health risks come from?

Health risks can come from any of these:

- too much time under the lights
- not enough time between tanning sessions
- contaminated eyewear
- contaminated tanning bed surfaces
- the wrong type of eye protection

Questions to ask yourself before deciding to use a tanning device

- ☐ Has the local health department inspected the tanning salon?

The health department inspects tanning salons regularly. Inspections help make sure tanning salon is following what the health department requires to protect client's health ("Personal Service Establishment Regulation" and "Guidelines for Tanning Salon Operators"). To view our latest health inspection reports, go online to fraserhealth.ca/pse.



- ☐ Do the tanning salon staff sound like they know what they are doing? Did they tell me about the health risks of using tanning devices?

The tanning salon staff should do each of the following:

- Explain the health risks and injuries.
- Warn that certain medicines like antibiotics and certain cosmetics can increase the effects of UV radiation.
- Warn of possible reactions, such as sunburn or itchiness, and that these effects might not show up right away.

Tanning salon staff should be willing to answer questions about tanning equipment, health risks, and length of time spent "under the lights".

Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns before you start indoor tanning. Always report any reactions from tanning to the salon staff. See your doctor for any health concerns.

- ☐ Do I know how many minutes I should spend under the lights for my skin type?

The tanning salon operator can help you to decide the right amount of time for you. You should wait at least 48 hours between each tanning session. This is the minimum time your skin needs to repair the damage from the UV radiation.

- ☐ Are my eyes protected?

Protective eyewear or goggles can be single use or reusable. You must use protective eyewear intended for use in indoor tanning beds. You cannot use sunglasses. They will not protect your eyes enough.

If the tanning salon provides reusable protective eyewear or goggles, ask them how they disinfect them. Staff must disinfect reusable eye protection after each customer.

We suggest you buy your own protective eyewear.

- ☐ Are tanning bed surfaces disinfected after each customer?

A disinfectant such as a bleach and water solution can help kill harmful germs.

- ☐ Have I read the warning labels on the tanning device? Am I following the warnings each time I use the tanning device?

- ☐ Do I know where the "on-off" switch is in case of an emergency?

Ask tanning salon staff to show you where to find the switch.

Tanning salon myths and surprising truths

Myth: Using an indoor tanning salon to get a tan before going on a hot weather vacation will protect you from getting a sunburn.

Truth: It will not protect your skin. Always use sunscreen to protect your skin from the sun's ultraviolet rays. This helps protect you from getting skin cancer later in life.

Myth: Indoor tanning is safer than outdoor tanning.

Truth: There is no safe way to tan. Exposure to ultraviolet radiation from tanning beds, sunlamps, or the sun is linked to health problems like those described in this sheet.

For questions or concerns, contact your local Health Protection office.

To find an office near you:

- Go to fraserhealth.ca/healthprotection.
- Scan this QR Code.

