

Skin Cancer Increase Calls for Higher Minimum Tanning Age, Doctors Say

By Priscilla Yeon, State House News Service

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, July 12, 2006..... The rising number of melanoma cases among young adults in the state calls for an increase in the minimum age for use of indoor tanning salons, according to doctors, professors and a state senator who testified before the Committee on Public Health today.

Walpole Democrat James Timilty said he is proposing a bill that prohibits individuals less than 16 years of age from using tanning devices. It also requires parental consent for 16 and 17 year olds to use artificial tanning and a signed document, provided by the local board of health, warning the dangers of exposure to ultraviolet radiation.

The law now requires that any person under 14 must be accompanied by a parent to use a tanning facility. It also states that individuals between 14 and 17 must have written parental permission and signed notice of warning.

Timilty said that 1.1 million new cases of skin cancer is diagnosed in the United States every year and the incidence rate of melanoma has doubled in the last 30 years. "Today, one out of every two cancers diagnosed in the U.S. is skin cancer," said Timilty.

Given body image obsession and television influences, tanning has become predominantly more common among young women, he said. The fastest growing demographic of skin cancer incidents is among young women in their late 20s and early 30s, he added.

"Medical evidence proves that most skin damage occurs during youth," said Timilty. "The Commonwealth first passed the law regulating tanning facilities in 1990 . . . I believe we must update our tanning facilities law to ensure the good health of our citizens."

The bill received endorsements from several organizations, including from Shonda Schilling's SHADE Foundation. Shonda Schilling is married to Red Sox ace pitcher Curt Schilling. Melanoma experts who spoke in favor of the bill highlighted the "misconception" that indoor tanning is "healthier" than outdoor tanning.

Alan Geller, associate professor of dermatology at Boston University School of Medicine and co-chair for the National Council for

Skin Cancer Prevention, testified in favor of the bill.

"Tanning beds are now more common among teenage girls than smoking cigarettes," said Geller, adding some people visit tanning booths 40 times a year.

Karen Rothman, a pediatrician and dermatologist at UMASS Medical Center, said the ultraviolet dosage from tanning beds is five times higher than that of sunlight and urged legislators "to minimize the use of tanning beds, especially among children."

Massachusetts has one of the highest skin cancer rates in the nation and a 19 percent higher mortality rate among melanoma cases than the rest of the country, he added.

Marie-France Demierre, director of skin oncology and associate professor of dermatology at Boston University School of Medicine, said UVA rays, produced by tanning devices, "penetrate extremely deep into the skin" causing long-term skin damages.

"We know UVA contributes to skin cancer," said Demierre. "There is mounting evidence that melanoma increases with the use of indoor tanning, particularly at a young age."

Deborah Girard, executive director of the Massachusetts Melanoma Foundation, said there is a need for legislation and education so people understand that "there is no such thing as healthy tanning."

"We have an opportunity with this legislation to provide protection to our most vulnerable assets, our children," said Girard.

Timilty said he is confident legislators will approve the bill.

"We have a wonderful case and we have a wonderful science behind it," said Timilty who hopes his bill, S2590, gets a favorable vote by both branches before July 31, when formal sessions end.

No one testified against the bill.