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Putting curbs on teen tanning

BY JIM HAND / SUN CHRONICLE STAFF

Children younger than 16 would be prohibited from using tanning salons, and older teens would need their parents permission under a law proposed by state Sen. James Timilty.

Local tanning salons said, however, they already require parental approval for young people.

Timilty, D-Walpole, said he filed the bill this week because he is concerned with the rising rate of skin cancer.

“Skin cancer is epidemic in our country today. More than 1 million Americans will probably get skin cancer this year,” he said.

Timilty said the problem is even more prevalent in Massachusetts.

“In Massachusetts, about 615 men and 505 woman are diagnosed with melanoma each year, and our state has a melanoma mortality rate that is 19 percent higher than national rates,” he said.

The American Academy of Dermatology has warned that the situation is becoming an epidemic among young people.

Timilty said that is why his bill concentrates on young people.

He said health officials advise young people not to use tanning salons.

His bill would prohibit children younger than 16 from using tanning salons. Youths ages 16 and 17 would need their parents' permission.

A licensing fee would also be adjusted to fund better oversight of salons by boards of health, he said.

Some local tanning salon operators said the parental permission regulation does not bother them because they already require it for young people.

“That has always been our policy,” said Deb Johnson, manager of Salon 2000 in North Attleboro.

She said she requires teens to bring their parent in with them and sign a permission form to ensure that the signature is not forged.

“Basically, with us, you have to be 18 or older or have your parents' permission,” she said.

Laura Erickson, manager of Tanorama of North Attleboro, said she also agrees with the parental permission requirement.

This time of year in particular, many teens come into the salon with a parent to get a tan for their school prom, she said.

However, she said she disagrees with the 16-year-old age limit.

She said families who are going on vacation to hot climates in the winter often like to have their children get a little tan at the salon to protect against sunburn.

She said she has had customers as young as 12 or 13.

“If you are white as snow, and you go to the Caribbean, you're going to get scorched in the sun. When you burn, that is when the worst damage is done,” she said.

But, Timilty said young people are more vulnerable because their rapid growth rate means skin cells are dividing more quickly than those of adults.

“There is mounting evidence that the increased use of tanning facilities, especially among teens and young adults, has greatly contributed to a dramatic rise in the incidence of skin cancer,” he said.

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