

# YOUNG ADULTS AND INDOOR TANNING KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS IN SASKATCHEWAN: SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Each year in Saskatchewan more cases of skin cancer are diagnosed than any other type of cancer. Exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun and from indoor tanning is the primary cause of skin cancer. It is well recognized that the use of tanning beds is linked to an increased risk of all three main types of skin cancer: basal and squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. This risk is much higher when indoor tanning begins before age 35. Despite the risk, youth and young adults continue to use indoor tanning.

To better understand the scope of indoor tanning use among young adults in Saskatchewan and to inform policy makers and the public, Sun Smart Saskatchewan\* conducted a survey among young adults 18 to 24 years of age to measure their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to indoor tanning. The survey, collected during the spring and summer of 2014, included responses from 722 young adults from different size communities across the province.

## SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Overall, 21.8% of Saskatchewan young adults surveyed from 18 to 24 years of age have used indoor tanning. Female young adults are much more likely to have used indoor tanning compared to males, with 33.9% of females ever having done so compared with 9.7% of males.
- The majority of young adults who have used indoor tanning started when they were 16 to 18 years of age (58.4%). Young adults were less likely to have begun indoor tanning after the age of 18 (18.1% between 19 and 23).
- When tanning initiation begins in adolescence, the majority of indoor tanners are accompanied by their mother or female guardian (69.3%). As the age of tanning bed initiation increases, young adults are less likely to be accompanied by parents and more likely to go with friends or alone.
- Young adults who have used indoor tanning are more likely to report that at least one of their parents or guardian have indoor tanned at some point in the past year compared with non-indoor tanners (41.1% vs 19.3%). Indoor tanners are nearly three times as likely as non-indoor tanners to strongly agree with the statement “Many of my friends use indoor tanning” (35.6% vs 12.0%).
- Young adults who have used indoor tanning have more positive attitudes towards a tanned appearance. Indoor tanners almost unanimously agree that they look better when they have a tan (95.2%), compared to non-indoor tanners (72.4%). Indoor tanners are also more likely to agree that having a tanned appearance makes people look healthier (61.3% vs 51.1% of non-tanners). The key reasons identified for using indoor tanning include special events, gaining a protective base tan, and to look attractive.
- Knowledge of the risks of indoor tanning was high among the young adults surveyed. Indoor tanners and non-indoor tanners strongly agree in equal measures with the statement, “Indoor tanning can cause skin cancer” (94.8% and 92.6%).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Intentional exposure to UVR from indoor tanning is entirely preventable. This survey helps to increase awareness of the risk-taking behaviours of young adults and to identify areas for action to reduce skin cancer risk. Findings from this survey support the following recommendations.

- The age of initiation of indoor tanning use among the majority of young adults in Saskatchewan began at 16 to 18 years of age (58.4%). Survey findings also indicate that young adults are less likely to initiate indoor tanning as they age (18.1% between 19 and 23). Preventing the initiation of indoor tanning by restricting the age of first tanning bed use could reduce the risk of developing skin cancer over their lifetime. Youth tanning bed legislation for those under the age of 18 could reduce the harm associated with tanning bed use.
- Indoor tanners were very likely to have been accompanied by a mother or female guardian (69.3%) if they first used tanning beds under the age of 18. This finding shows that parents are taking youth under the age of 18 to indoor tan. As such, parents may be an important influence on tanning behaviour. Given these findings, parental consent regulations would be ineffective in restricting youth access to tanning beds.
- Young adults are using tanning beds despite being aware of the health risks. Knowledge levels among young adults who use indoor tanning are high. At the same time, appearance related motives for tanning are very important to this age group. Most young adults who had used indoor tanning felt that they looked better with tanned skin (95.2% compared to 72.4% of non-indoor tanners). Consequently, indoor tanners are unlikely to be receptive to campaigns focused on education about health-risks alone. Interventions may need to explore campaigns focused on appearance-related behaviours and work to address the underlying social norms that continue to drive young adults, particularly females, to use indoor tanning.

Full survey report available at [sunsmartsk.ca](https://sunsmartsk.ca)

\*Sun Smart Saskatchewan is a coalition of partner agencies committed to preventing and reducing the incidence and mortality from skin cancer in the province.

