

Melanoma: Like Mother, Like Daughter?

Just a few weeks ago, I had a cancerous growth removed. It was a nonmelanoma, which is the most common form of skin cancer. There are more than 2 million cases of nonmelanoma diagnosed each year – and, speaking as a dermatologist, the irony certainly wasn't lost on me. As a mother, it reminded me just how much more we need to do as parents to educate our children about the importance of protecting our skin to prevent skin cancer.

It's estimated that 1 in 5 Americans will be affected by some form of skin cancer during his or her lifetime, and exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays is the most preventable risk factor. Easy steps like applying sunscreen, wearing sun-protective clothing and seeking shade all help to lessen your skin cancer risk. If I had done these simple things when I was a young outdoor athlete, I might not have developed multiple skin cancers.

Indoor tanning beds are another source of dangerous UV rays – using them has been shown to increase the likelihood of melanoma by 75%. Yet, more than one million people use tanning beds each day.

A survey by the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) of Caucasian women ages 14-22 found that almost a third (32%) had used a tanning bed in the past year. Respondents who had gone indoor tanning were more than twice as likely to have a family member who used a tanning bed. More specifically, those who used tanning beds were 4 times as likely to indicate that their *mothers* also use them when compared to non-indoor tanners.

Tanning beds are so unsafe that the AAD has called for banning their use, and groups like the World Health Organization and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have placed them in the same cancer-causing category as tobacco. It is troubling to me, as a dermatologist, a skin cancer survivor, and a mother, to know that there are parents who allow their daughters to continue with these harmful behaviors and mothers who set a dangerous example themselves by continuing to use tanning beds.

It's easy to understand why indoor tanning is so popular with teen girls: they are constantly barraged with images of celebrities and pop culture icons sporting tans, even though what Hollywood calls "a healthy glow" is anything but.

And of course, their friends also play a role: almost half of the indoor tanning respondents in the survey (49%) said they felt peer pressure to be tan.

As parents, we can push back, in the same way we talk to our kids about the dangers of drinking, smoking and drugs. Educating ourselves about the [health risks of indoor tanning](#) – and passing that knowledge on to our children will go a long way in the fight against skin cancer.

Donna Regen, a Dallas resident who lost her daughter, Jaime, to melanoma 4 years ago, agreed to be part of the [AAD's public service advertisement campaign](#) against indoor tanning.

"Mothers who allow their daughters to tan are putting their daughters' lives at risk," says Donna. "No mother should have to visit her daughter in a cemetery."

As much data as there is to make the case against indoor tanning, in the end, it's setting a good example in the home and having those conversations between daughters and their moms, dads or caregivers that has the greatest impact. I believe passionately that one day this approach could save our daughters' lives.