

Despite Warnings, More Youth in Ontario Using Indoor Tanning Beds

Majority (52%) of Teen Users Say Parents Pay for their Tanning Sessions

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Toronto, ON - Despite warnings from the health community and beyond about the ill-effects of using indoor tanning beds—particularly for young people, more Ontario youth are using tanning beds than before, according to a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Canadian Cancer Society.

The survey, conducted among those in grade 7 to 12 and between the ages of 12 and 17, reveals that one in ten (8%) youth in Ontario are using a tanning bed, up from 5% six years ago, and 1% are using tanning lamps. Focusing specifically on those in grade 11 and 12, the data show that 16% are using tanning beds, up from 7% in 2006 – representing an increase of over 100% for those in their latter years of high school. The largest jump occurs between grade 11 (11% use tanning beds) and grade 12 (21% use tanning beds). The average tanner uses a bed 10 times a year, and one quarter (25%) of youth tanners have already been using a tanning bed for two to three years, while 4% have been doing so for more than three years.

Interestingly, parents appear to be a significant catalyst for youth when it comes to indoor tanning. One quarter (24%) of youth indoor tanners say that their parent first introduced them to tanning, placing them ahead of other people at school (13%), a sister (9%) or brother (1%), someone from a sports team (1%) or some other person (1%). Most (51%), however, say that a friend introduced them to tanning.

Not only are many parents introducing their children to indoor tanning, but a majority of youth tanners (52%) says that their parent pays for their tanning bed use, while fewer than half (46%) pay for it themselves. Others say that a boyfriend/girlfriend (1%) pays for it, or some other person (1%).

Thinking about the reasons why they use a tanning bed, youth have a wide range of reasons for using one: thinking they look better with tan (61%), wanting to build a base (52%), to be tanned before vacation (48%) or a special occasion (38%), their friends use them (37%), to prolong their existing tan (30%), to relax (26%), that beds/lamps are safer than the sun for getting a tan (18%), that it increases their vitamin D levels (17%), that it's the healthiest and safest way to tan (15%), that it's a safer way to get vitamin D than the sun (14%), that it's important to have a year-round tan (13%), or some other reason (4%). Perhaps informing their views, nearly half (45%) of all youth 'agree' (15% strongly/31% somewhat) that 'people who tan look healthy', compared to just two in ten (21%) who 'disagree' (8% strongly/13% somewhat) with this premise. A similar proportion of youth 'agrees' (17% strongly/29% somewhat) that 'people look more attractive when they have a tan', while just two in ten (20%) 'disagree' (8% strongly/12% somewhat).

From a health perspective, many youth apparently have some false knowledge about tanning beds. One in ten (12%) tanners 'agree' (5% strongly/7% somewhat) that 'using tanning beds/lamps actually helps prevent some forms of cancer', and two in ten (19%) 'agree' (9% strongly/10% somewhat) that they 'use a tanning bed/lamp because it increases their vitamin D levels'.

Interestingly, Ontario youth's level of trust of indoor tanning companies is quite low. Just two in ten (21%) believe that indoor tanning companies are 'trustworthy' (2% very/19% somewhat) 'in terms of providing reliable health information', placing them somewhere in

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between the level of trust that they have for fast-food companies (38%) and tobacco companies (10%). Furthermore, just one in ten (11%) Ontario youth 'agree' (3% strongly/7% somewhat) that they trust tanning companies to take their health seriously, and a similar proportion (9%) 'agrees' (3% strongly/6% somewhat) that they trust tanning companies to have their best interests at heart.

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted in April, 2012, on behalf of the Canadian Cancer Society's Ontario Division. For this survey, a sample of 1,476 students in grades 7-12, aged 12 to 17, from Ipsos' Canadian online panel was interviewed online. To access these students we targeted parents who had children in the household and asked these parents for their consent and to have their child complete the survey on their own. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. Gender was split 50/50, census data provided regional weights and each grade level was given equal weight. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what the results would have been had the entire population of students in Ontario in grade 7 to 12, aged 12 to 17, been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error.

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