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Putting Kids First: Cancer Patients, Physicians Call for Approval of New Legislation Banning Indoor Tanning for Minors

Bills Introduced Today Protect Teenagers, Especially Teenage Girls, from Dramatically Increased Risk of Cancer Linked to Indoor Tanning

LANSING—Physicians with the Michigan State Medical Society today joined young cancer patients and patient advocates asking the state Legislature to approve a new package of bills that would ban minors from using indoor tanning facilities. The common sense reform legislation puts Michigan kids first by protecting teens and children, especially teenage girls, from the dramatically increased risk of cancer linked to indoor tanning.

House Bills 4404 and 4405, introduced today by state Representative Jim Townsend (D-Royal Oak), would protect Michigan teens by prohibiting minors from using indoor tanning facilities.

"Indoor tanning has been directly linked with a dramatically increased risk of skin cancers especially for girls who start tanning at a young age," said Kay Watnick, M.D., an Oakland County dermatologist and Immediate Past President of the Michigan Dermatological Society, who treats teenage patients who have damaged their skin through indoor tanning. "Using a tanning bed is particularly dangerous for younger users. We have a responsibility to protect our children and we encourage lawmakers to pass these potentially life-saving reforms as soon as possible."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), individuals who begin tanning indoors at a young age have a 75 percent higher risk of being diagnosed with melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer and the number one cancer killer of young women nationwide.

In addition to melanoma, indoor tanning has been directly linked with squamous cell carcinoma and ocular melanoma, or cancer of the eye.

Despite the dramatic risks, indoor tanning use by teens – especially teenage girls – is at near epidemic proportions. While 13 percent of all high school students admit to using indoor tanning facilities, a staggering 32 percent of girls in the 12th grade use tanning beds.

(MORE)

“If I hadn’t started tanning as a teenager I likely never would have gotten cancer,” said Anne Goulet, a 22-year-old cancer survivor and student at Central Michigan University. “I hope now that my story can help girls across the state understand the risks of indoor tanning. I hope the legislature will listen, too, and pass these bills soon to help save lives.”

Goulet was diagnosed with melanoma in August 2010. She began tanning indoors when she was a freshman in high school and tanned regularly until she began college.

“We cannot turn a blind eye while our daughters and sons, nieces and nephews, and friends are put at such a terrifying risk of cancer,” said Representative Townsend, sponsor of the bills. “The CDC, Michigan physicians and cancer patients themselves have sounded the alarm about the deadly risks of indoor tanning. It is time we listen and put the lives of our young people first.”

In addition to the Michigan State Medical Society, the bills are supported by the Michigan Dermatological Society and the American Cancer Society Action Network.

MSMS is a professional association of more than 16,000 Michigan physicians. Its mission is to promote a health care environment which supports physicians in caring for, and enhancing the health of Michigan citizens through science, quality, and ethics in the practice of medicine. Please visit www.msms.org/ for more information.

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