

# Indoor Tanning Leads to Skin Cancer for Local Teenager and Many Others

By Julie Wilkins

“Whenever I turned on the television or went to the movies, I saw beautiful people with amazing tans,” says Lee Davies, 19, of Greenpoint. “I just wanted to be like them.”

Unfortunately for Lee, her desire for a deep dark tan had an unexpected result: skin cancer. And Lee’s not alone. Experts say that more than a million Americans get skin cancer each year. According to the American Cancer Society, the primary cause of skin cancer is excessive exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun and indoor tanning.

Lee Davies used to love indoor tanning. She began tanning, with her parents’ permission, at a local salon when she was 16 years old. “It was fun,” she says even now. “The people at the salon were so nice. And being on the tanning beds was relaxing. It was great to have a tan all year-round.”

Early last year, though, Lee noticed a small lump on her neck. She was very concerned about it and called Greenpoint dermatologist Dr. Sidney Daltrey. It turned out that Lee had a form of skin cancer called basal cell cancer.



Dr. Daltrey says that Lee’s quick action helped prevent her cancer from becoming more serious. “The key with skin cancer is early detection and early treatment,” explains Dr. Daltrey. “We were able to remove Lee’s tumor. She has a small scar on her neck, but she’s cancer-free now.”

That’s the good news. The bad news is that Lee might not be in the clear just yet. “Many of these skin cancers are the result of years of UV exposure,” says Dr. Daltrey. “The damage to the skin cells builds each time you tan. Lee’s healthy now, but all the tanning she’s done could lead to more skin cancer later in her life.”

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### *“Indoor tanning” continued from B1*

According to Dr. Daltrey, light-skinned people like Lee are the ones most at risk for skin cancer.

Today Lee Davies feels lucky to be healthy again. And she has no interest in hitting the beach or the tanning bed anytime soon. “I know that if I’m smart about it and protect myself, I could still be out in the sun,” she says. “But you know what? I’m afraid of being out there. I feel the warmth on my skin – I used to love that feeling – and now it just feels like cancer. It reminds me of the tanning beds. And it feels like cancer.”

For Lee Davies, and many like her, the tumor may be gone, but the scars still remain.

#### Quick Facts about Skin Cancer

- Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer.
- One million people a year get skin cancer in the United States. That’s more than the *combined total* of all cancers of the prostate, breast, lung, colon, uterus, ovaries and pancreas.
- One in five Americans will have skin cancer at some point in their lives.
- One American dies every hour from skin cancer.
- Skin cancer is caused by too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun and indoor tanning equipment.
- The most dangerous kind of skin cancer is called melanoma. Melanoma can spread throughout a person’s body and sometimes be fatal.
- When people use indoor tanning equipment in their teens or 20s, it dramatically increases their risk of getting melanoma.
- Serious sunburns, whether from the sun or indoor tanning equipment, greatly increase a person’s chances of getting skin cancer later in life.
- Most skin cancers are curable with early detection and treatment.
- Light-skinned people are most at risk for skin cancer. However, some dark-skinned people also do get skin cancer.
- Anyone, *regardless of skin type*, can develop health problems from excessive exposure to UV radiation. In addition to skin cancer, some of these problems include premature skin wrinkling, cataracts and other eye problems, and weakened immune systems.