



Sunbed use among children and adults in Ireland and implications for skin cancer prevention

Dr Ciara Reynolds - Expert Policy Advisor
Dr Helen McAvoy - Director of Policy

Health Promotion Conference

June 25th 2026



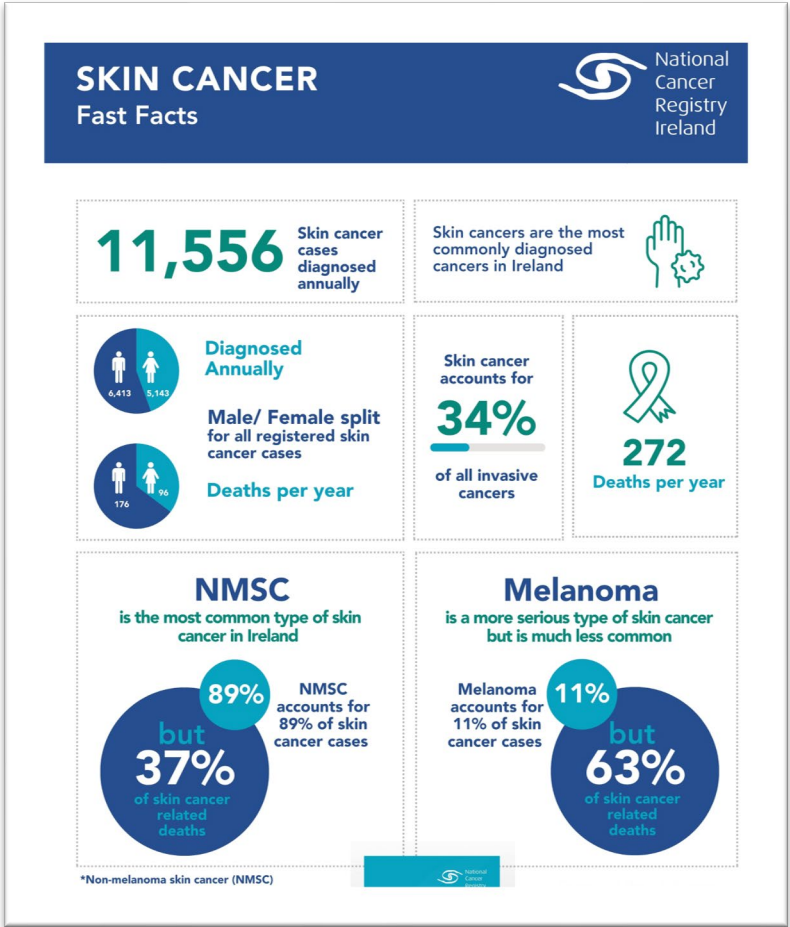
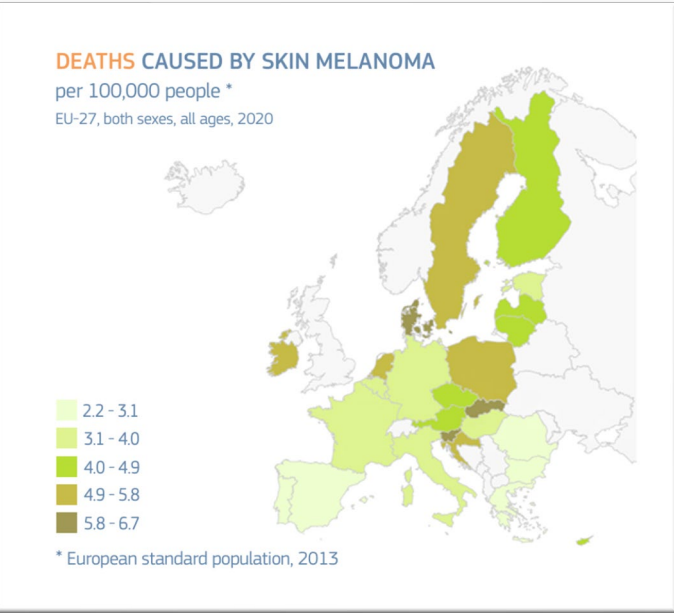
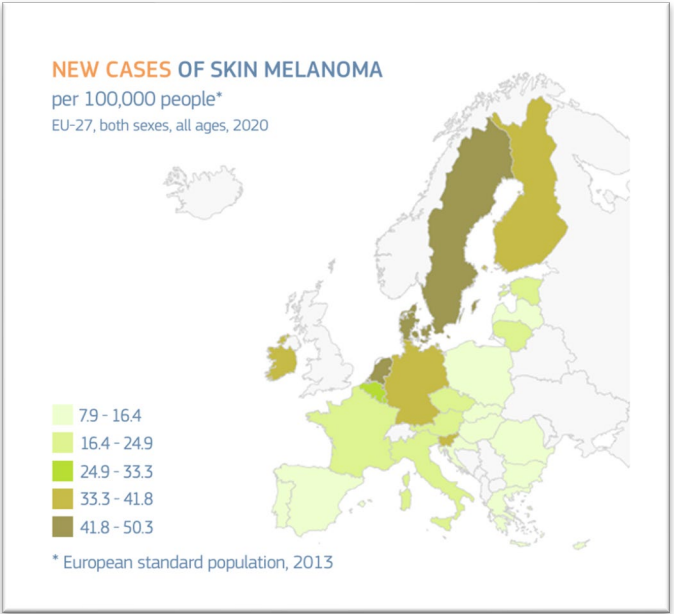
The All Island Institute
of Public Health
informs public policy to
support healthier
populations in Ireland
and Northern Ireland.



Why is it important?

Score	Description	Female	Male
0-6	Pale white skin Extremely sensitive skin, always burns, never tans Example: red hair with freckles		
Type I			
7-13	White skin Very sensitive skin, burns easily, tans minimally Example: fair skinned, fair haired Caucasians, northern Asians		
Type II			
14-20	Light brown skin Sensitive skin, sometimes burns, slowly tans to light brown Example: darker Caucasians, some Asians		
Type III			
21-27	Moderate brown skin Mildly sensitive, burns minimally, always tans to moderate brown Example: Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Caucasians, southern Asians		
Type IV			
28-34	Dark brown skin Resistant skin, rarely burns, tans well Example: some Hispanics, some Africans		
Type V			
35+	Deeply pigmented dark brown to black skin Very resistant skin, never burns, deeply pigmented Example: darker Africans, Indigenous Australians		
Type VI			

* The information published here is not intended to take the place of medical advice. Please seek advice from a qualified health care professional.





Why is it important?

- There is no safe limit for exposure to UV radiation from sunbeds
- All sunbed use carries a risk of skin cancer - highest risk associated with sunbed use in childhood and adolescence, and with frequent use.
- Even sunbeds that comply with EU standards emit UVR:
 - at levels equivalent to midday tropical sun
 - intensities equivalent to an “extreme” UV index (>11),
 - UVA intensities well above anything experienced in nature
- Complete carcinogen



What did we do?



Legislation and policy context

European Low Voltage Directive (2014/35/EU)

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014

Ireland's National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026

National Skin Cancer Prevention Plan (2023-2026)

National Cancer Control Programme

The Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025

2025 Programme for Government

Profile of sunbed users in Ireland

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey 2018 and 2022

The NCCP and DCEDIY qualitative report

Healthy Ireland 2019 and 2022

Profile of sunbed providers in Ireland

HSE National Environmental Health Service (NEHS) (2015-2023)

National research on sunbeds

University of Stirling report on the marketing practices of sunbed operators

International evidence

Rapid review of the evidence of effectiveness of decreasing health risks from sunbed use

Additional evidence outside of parameters of the search

Case study of the Australian commercial sunbed ban

Overview of international sunbed regulations





What did we find in national data?

Among children aged 10 to 17 years:

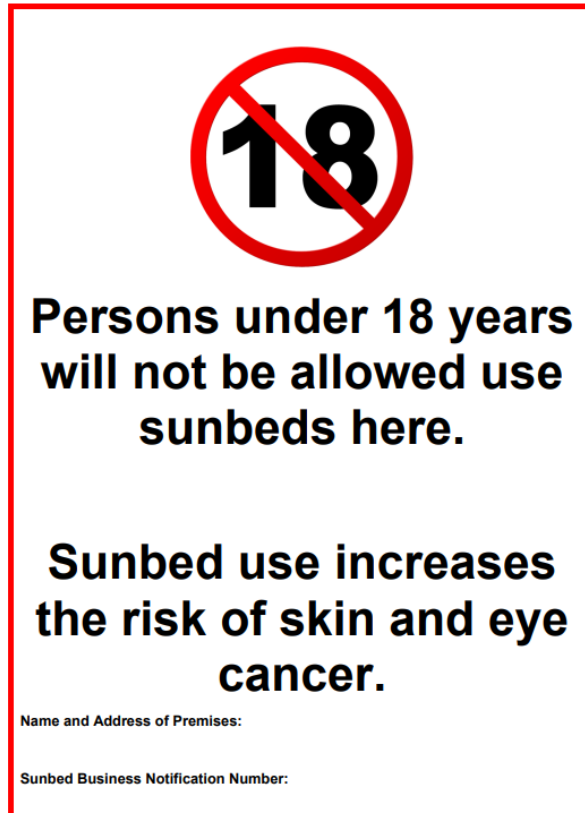
- One in twenty (5.2%) reported that they had ever used a sunbed
- 4.4% used a sunbed in the last 12 months
- Potential increase in sunbed use (more data needed)
- Children reported sunbed operators' poor compliance with other regulations i.e. eye protection, health risks
- Sunbed use appears to be similar among both boys and girls and among pre-teen and teenage children.

Among adults aged ≥ 15 years:

- One in six (18.1%) reported that they had ever used a sunbed
- More women than men engage in sunbed use
- Current sunbed use was reported across all age groups - 22.9% of current users were aged 15 to 24 years and almost half were under 35 years.



What did we find out from enforcement data?



- There is no licensing system for sunbed operators in Ireland
- In 2023, there were over 360 known sunbed operators in Ireland, the majority were in Dublin (n=78)
- Sunbed providers are dominated by those offering sunbeds for use on the premises (93%) over sale or hire
- The majority of sunbeds are operated from a beauty salon
- In 2023 there were:
 - 394 infringements observed across 368 inspections
 - 30 infringements observed across 35 mystery shopper engagements
 - 10 infringements observed across 47 test purchasing engagements
 - 17 Fixed Payment Notices served, and 4 prosecutions taken under the Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014.



What did we find out from Irish research?

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Selling sunbeds [Get access >](#)

Amy Long , Alison Long, Karen Eustace

Clinical and Experimental Dermatology, Volume 50, Issue 2, February 2025, Pages 418–420, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ced/llae357>

Independent research suggests that there are new markets for sunbeds operating through online platforms which could make age restrictions and overall enforcement of regulation more challenging.



Examining the marketing activities and strategies used by commercial sunbed operators in Ireland

A report prepared for the Institute of Public Health and HSE's National Cancer Control Programme

Richard I. Purves and Amber Morgan
Institute for Social Marketing and Health, University of Stirling



- Two of the largest sunbed operators in Dublin
- Sunbed operators used social media to “heavily promote” tanning lotions, run seasonal promotions and post ‘limited time offers’ using image-heavy content
- The study also found that some promotions offered customers free lotions if they purchased pre-paid sunbed minutes, while others offered discounts on tanning lotions (student discounts)
- The research also found that the commercial sunbed operators made “less direct” health claims in their marketing of tanning lotions or tanning drinks, which are not covered under the current sunbed regulations

What did we find out from international evidence?



Promoting education strategies (behaviour change)

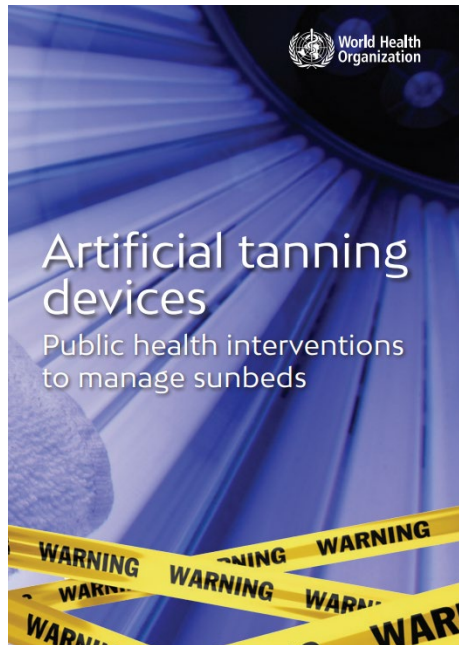
- Behaviour change interventions do not result in reduced sunbed use but there is evidence to support some features i.e. promoting alternatives, school based health education

Regulation (Complete ban of sunbeds)

- A complete ban:
 - Banning sunbeds would lead to fewer cases of melanoma, and fewer melanoma related deaths
 - Cost savings from a complete sunbed ban - productivity gains from a ban are higher than cost savings for avoided health care costs
 - Banning sunbeds for all ages (i.e., total ban) saves more money than age restrictions
 - Higher cost savings in the long term for a total sunbed ban compared to sun safety programmes

Other evidence - Compliance

- Compliance with sunbed legislation is generally poor, particularly in respect of age restrictions and health warnings
- UV irradiance above the threshold limit (0.3 W/m^2) in $> 55\%$ of inspected centres, in some countries the rate was above 90%, over a third of countries did not test and certify equipment
- 42% did not have mandatory technical inspections of devices



How are other countries regulating sunbeds?



Category	Measure	Description	Countries/ Jurisdictions/ Continents
Banning sunbeds	Banning all artificial devices	Banned the trade and use of artificial tanning sunbeds	Iran, Brazil, Australia
	Banning the hire and sale of sunbeds for domestic use	No person under the age of 18 years of age are allowed to either purchase or hire a sunbed	Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland
		Prohibits the sale of sunbeds for domestic use	France, Italy, Spain
Restricting access to sunbeds	Prohibiting unsupervised artificial tanning services	Banned unsupervised operations at the same time as restricting access by age	Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales Austria, Belgium, Chile, Finland, Latvia, Slovakia, Germany
	Setting an age-limit on sunbed use ¹¹	Sunbed use banned for all those under 18 years	Ireland, Northern Ireland, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, France, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Israel, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, US (Not in all States and also differing age restrictions; <14 years apply in Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, and North Dakota, <16 years apply in Indiana, Tennessee, and Wisconsin, and <17 years in apply in Connecticut, and New Jersey)

Has it been done elsewhere?



Modelling study –
Ban would avert:

- 31,009 melanomas
- 468,249 keratinocyte cancers
- Save >\$64 million in healthcare costs
- Produce \$516 million in productivity gains

<1% of population use sunbeds

Buy back scheme – Some states

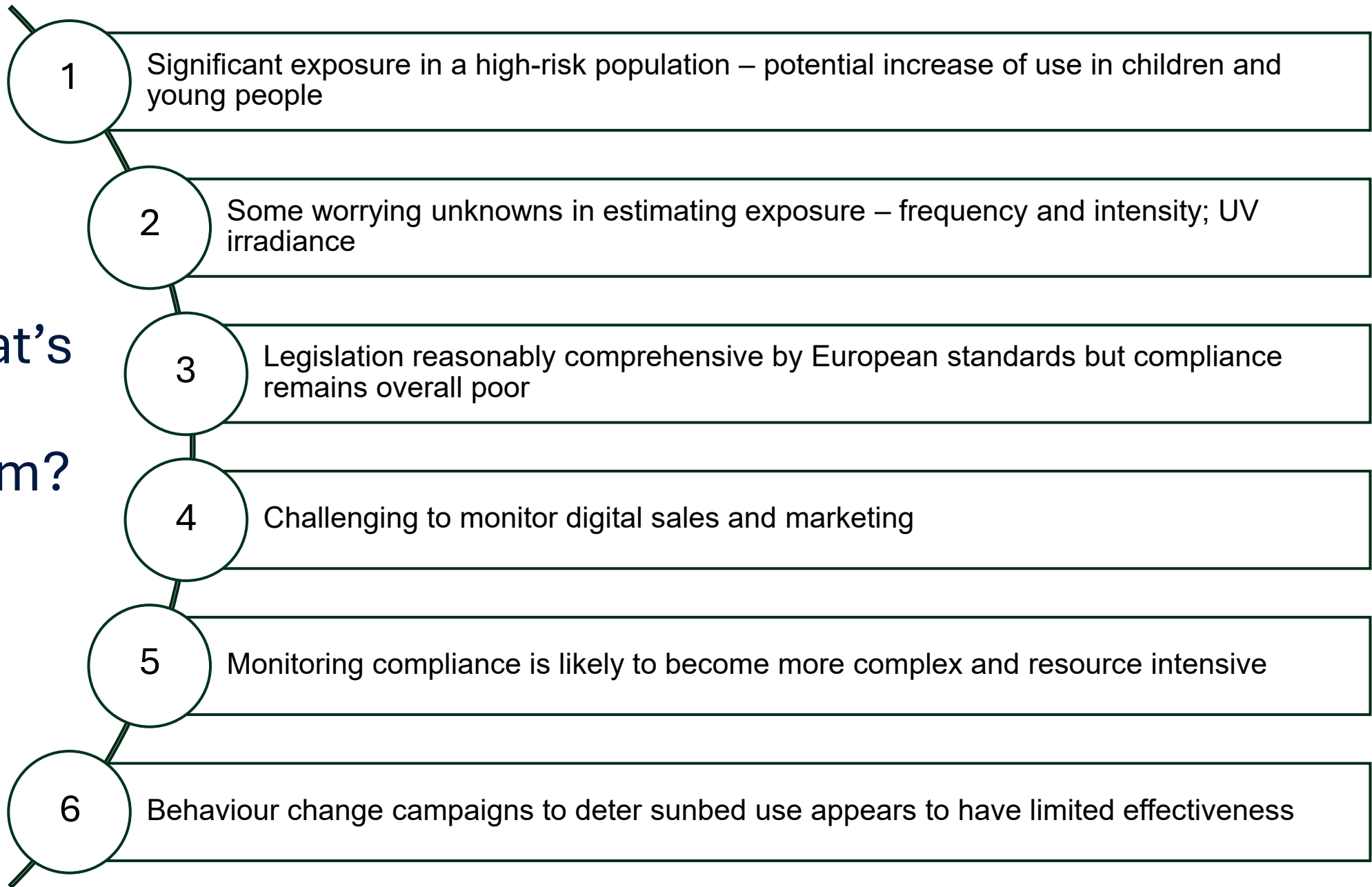
Decreased adverts - increased price

Government inspections of all sites

Overall good public support and compliance

Domestic market extremely small

So what's the problem?





What is the best solution?

Option 1 - Status Quo (Do nothing)

Option 2 - Further restrictions

Make some amendments to existing legislation (for example, a licensing system, types of sunbeds, monitoring of sunbed irradiance and types, skin type, training), potentially in combination with the enforcement and behaviour change and training actions

Option 3 - Commercial ban

Commercial sunbed ban*

*need for evaluation, cost-benefit evaluation, feasibility studies and for the necessary actions to comply with domestic law and European law mechanisms



What happened next?

Press release

Minister Murnane O'Connor welcomes IPH report on sunbed use and announces a cross-departmental Working Group to explore a ban on commercial sunbed use

From: [Department of Health](#)

Published on: 9 July 2025

Last updated on: 9 July 2025

- Three reports published:
 - Public Consultation Report
 - Stakeholder Engagement Workshop report
 - Working Group Report
- Based on the available evidence, the majority of the Sunbed Working Group concluded that the public health rationale for a ban on commercial sunbed use is compelling.
- Submitted Report to the Minister of State at the Department of Health with special responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and the National Drugs Strategy



ALL ISLAND
**Institute of
Public Health**

A Healthier
Island for All

instituteofpublichealth.org

Email: ciara.reynolds@instituteofpublichealth.org

<https://instituteofpublichealth.org/news/new-report-evidence-supports-sunbed-ban-reduce-skin-cancer-ireland>