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Young woman gets skin cancer after frequent indoor tanning



Kate Neale, a melanoma skin cancer survivor, started using tanning beds at 16.
(Photo: Craig Robertson, QMI Agency)

As a teenager growing up in Belleville, Kate Neale wanted to be tanned. Against the wishes of her parents, Kate started using tanning beds at age 16.

In the beginning, she tanned two to three times a week but soon ended up going for 12 to 16 minutes in the highest UVB pressured bed (double strength) sessions up to 16 times per month. The recommended maximum tanning time on this particular bed was 12 minutes (there was a sticker on the bed that stated this), however the salon allowed customers to tan in this bed for up to 30 minutes.

After graduating high school, Kate accepted a job at a tanning salon. Her contract stated that in return for maintaining a tanned appearance she would receive 12 free indoor tanning sessions and one spray tan per month. She worked in the salon for two and half years and took full advantage of the free sessions.

In May 2011, Kate's mother noticed that a freckle on her daughter's stomach had changed. A visit to a dermatologist and a biopsy later, confirmed that the freckle was actually melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. Over the next few weeks, Kate underwent three more biopsies for skin lesions on her right breast, leg and arms.

"I'll never forget going to the surgeon's office with my mom — he thought she was the patient. When he realized that I was the patient, he told me I was the youngest person he'd ever treated for melanoma. I'm only 21," says Kate. "Fortunately my cancer was

found at an early-stage (Clarks Stage 2), when it was non-invasive. Today, I have a six-inch scar on my stomach and live with so much fear.”

Despite her experience, Kate says she’s still addicted to maintaining a tanned appearance but now uses self-tanning lotion or spray tanning. Her battle with skin cancer is not over. Frequently new spots appear on her skin and she says they are always changing. Although a recent biopsy tested negative for melanoma, Kate’s doctors tell her that chances of the cancer returning is high. Today, she’s left with 22 stitches on her left breast, and a total of 8 spots have been removed since June, one being pre-cancerous.

Recently, Kate started volunteering with the Canadian Cancer Society, spending her time educating teenagers about the dangers of indoor tanning and encouraging them to host a *Tan-Free Prom* this spring. She’s also become vocal about the need for regulation of the indoor tanning industry and has shared her story with the media across the province.

“If politicians need a reason to take action on this issue, they should just take a look at my story to see how tanning at a young age has impacted my life,” says Kate. On April 26, she joined Society volunteers and staff at Queen’s Park to discuss [Society recommendations on indoor tanning](#) and support the introduction of a private member’s bill that, if passed, would prohibit youth under the age of 18 from using indoor tanning equipment.

Ontario is lagging behind other provinces such as Nova Scotia and British Columbia in protecting youth from the dangers of indoor tanning. The government needs to hear from Ontarians that enough is enough.

It’s time to protect youth from indoor tanning

Go to takeaction.cancer.ca to send a letter to your MPP telling them to pass Bill 74, the Skin Cancer Prevention Act to help protect teens from the dangers of indoor tanning.

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