

## Sunbed operators in New Zealand

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**Abstract.** Since 2012 New Zealand Public Health staff have been visiting sunbed operators in their areas to try and improve compliance with the requirements of AS/NZS 2635:2008 Solaria for cosmetic purposes. Compliance with the practices in that Standard should reduce the health risks posed by indoor tanning. Over that time the number of operators has decreased by about one third, while compliance has slowly increased. Since the Auckland Health and Hygiene bylaw came into force in July 2014, compliance in Auckland has been better than the rest of the country. These findings are supported by “mystery shopper” inspections carried out by Consumer New Zealand. Most New Zealand operators have only one bed, and most provide 10 or fewer sunbed sessions per week - the sunbed is offered as a sideline to other services (hairdressing, beautician) provided by the operator. Only ten operators have four or more beds, and few provide more than 100 sessions per week. Most operators welcome the public health visits but, even though they are provided with resources to help them improve compliance with AS/NZS 2635:2008, the majority still falls short.

### Introduction

In 2012 the New Zealand Ministry of Health requested staff at Public Health Units (PHUs) around the country to visit all commercial sunbed operators in their areas every six months to:

- Provide information on reducing risks from sunbed use (based on the Standard AS/NZS 2635:2008 *Solaria for cosmetic purposes*);
- Make operators aware of sunbed regulations in other countries;
- Report on their findings

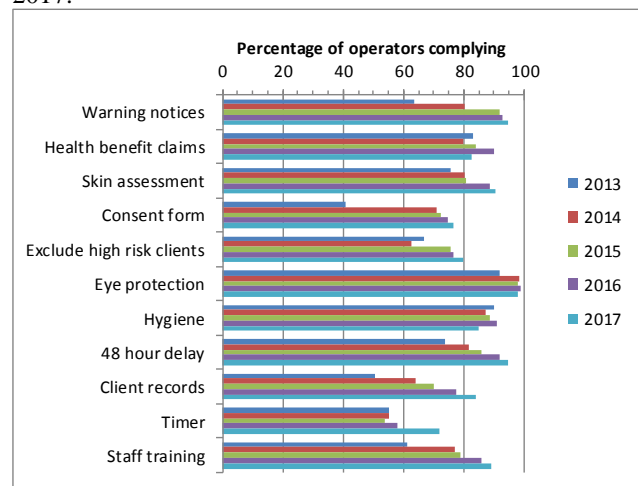
In order to assess the effectiveness of these visits, from 2013 PHUs were asked to assess how well operators complied with 11 areas of the Standard. These areas covered administrative and procedural aspects of the operation, and compliance should not be difficult for any operator. PHUs provided operators with templates of consent forms and warning signs, and a Ministry guide to compliance with the Standard (Ministry of Health, 2013).

PHUs were also asked to find out how many beds were used by each operator, and approximately how many sunbed sessions per week they provided.

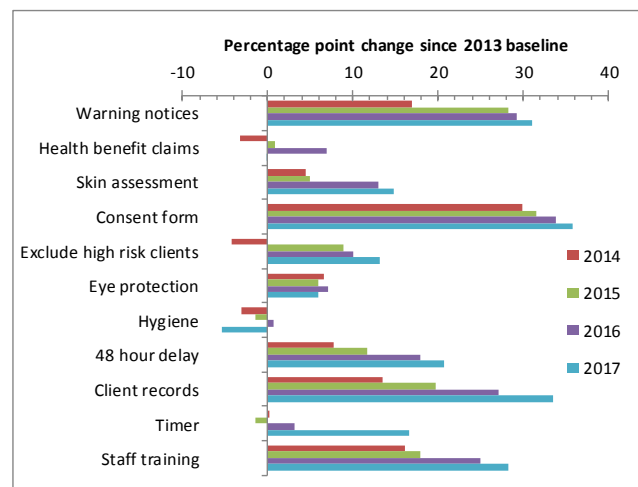
The Ministry of Health has also commissioned more limited surveys of sunbed operator practices from Consumer NZ (Consumer NZ, 2018). Consumer NZ use “mystery shoppers” so sunbed operators are unaware of the visits. Hence the Consumer NZ visits provide an independent check on the quality of the data, especially in areas where PHU staff are reliant on the honesty of the operator replies (such as whether they do not allow under-18s to use sunbeds).

### Operator compliance with AS/NZS 2635:2008

Over the five years that PHUs have been making a systematic assessment of sunbed operator practices, there has been a gradual improvement in most areas of operation. Figures 1 and 2 show that there have been considerable improvements in the display of warning notices, use of consent forms, maintenance of client records and staff training. The average score over all operators (calculated by giving a point for each of the eleven areas checked with which the operator complied and converting to a percentage) has increased from 72% in 2013 to 88% in 2017.



**Figure 1.** Compliance of sunbed operators with requirements in AS/NZS 2635:2008 in 11 areas of operation.



**Figure 2.** Percentage point changes in compliance with requirements in AS/NZS 2635:2008 since 2013.

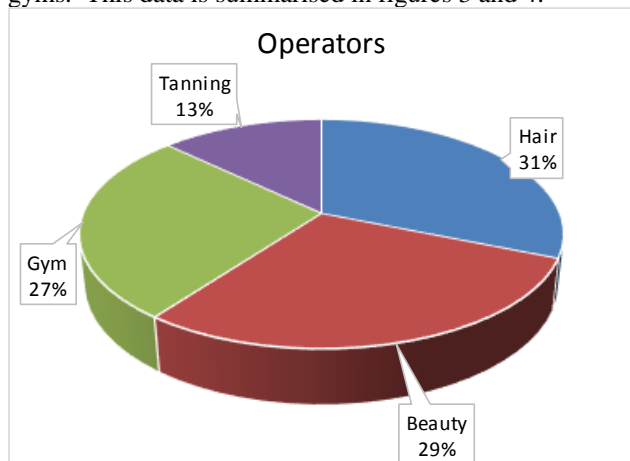
In 2014 the Auckland Council introduced a Health and Hygiene bylaw which effectively mandated compliance with the Standard. Separate analyses of compliance data

for Auckland and the rest of the country show that this has made a difference. In 2017 the average score for Auckland operators was 95%, compared with 87% for the rest of the country.

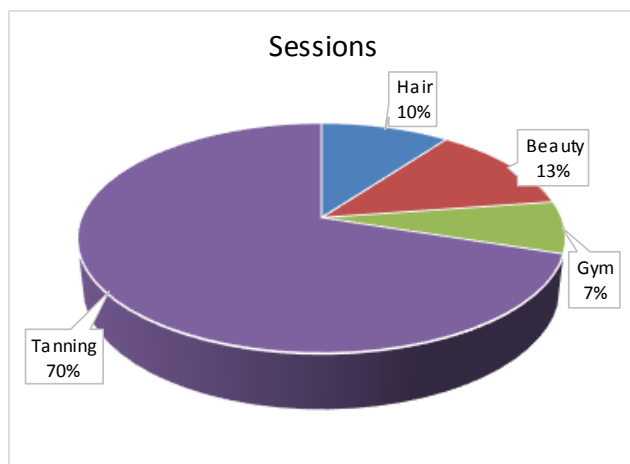
Comparison with Consumer NZ data shows reasonable agreement. In 2018 Consumer NZ found two establishments allowed an under-18 to use a sunbed, despite this being made illegal in 2017. In 2017, PHU staff had also found a few operators whom they considered could be offering sunbed sessions to under 18s.

### Characteristics of operators

Between 2013 and 2017, the number of operators decreased from 173 to 112 (this includes operators who have a sunbed which they say is not being used). Data from 2017 shows that more than 70% of the operators have only one sunbed, and most provide 10 or fewer sunbed sessions per week. Only 10 operators, all of whom offer tanning as their primary business, have four or more beds, and they are responsible for around 70% of the sunbed sessions provided. The operators with only one or two sunbeds are typically hair salons, beauticians (although interestingly the New Zealand Association of Registered Beauty Professionals does not support the use of sunbeds) and gyms. This data is summarised in figures 3 and 4.



**Figure 3.** Breakdown of sunbed operators in 2017 according to their primary business.



**Figure 4.** Breakdown of sunbed sessions in 2017 according to the primary business of the sunbed operator.

The specialist sunbed operators generally complied better with AS/NZS 2635:2008 than those for whom sunbed operations were a sideline.

### Discussion

Yearly visits to sunbed operators by PHU staff show a slow decrease in the number of establishments offering sunbed sessions, and a slow improvement in compliance with operating practices recommended in AS/NZS 2635:2008. The improvement has been more marked in Auckland, following introduction of a bylaw mandating compliance with the Standard. For most operators the sunbed is a sideline to their main business (such as hairdressing), and the few specialist operators are responsible for around 70% of the sunbed sessions delivered. The specialist operators tend to comply better with the requirements of the Standard. While the non-specialist operators generally welcome the PHU visits and say they would like to comply with the Standard, the fact that the sunbed is not their primary business probably accounts for their poorer performance.

The data on which these findings are based is not perfect, as a small percentage of operators refuses to be visited by the PHUs, and every year a few operators do not get visited for other reasons. In addition, there are probably a few operators not on the PHU lists. Nevertheless, these undocumented operators probably account for less than 10% of the total and are unlikely to affect the broad trends shown here.

### Acknowledgements

The Ministry of Health would like to acknowledge the work of the PHU staff involved in these visits, the Auckland Council for supplying their compliance visit data, and the Cancer Society Social & Behavioural Research Unit at the University of Otago for sharing their lists of sunbed operators.

### References

- Ministry of Health, 2013. Guidelines for operators of ultraviolet (UV) tanning lamps. 2013 edition. <http://www.emfservices.co.nz/SunbedOperatorGuidelinesV2.pdf>
- Consumer NZ, 2018. Nothing new under the sun. <https://www.consumer.org.nz/articles/sunbeds>