

HEALTH

# Doctor wants answers about risks of CFLs to autoimmune disease sufferers

Health Canada has a warning on its website, but more information is hard to find

BY GERRY BELLETT  
VANCOUVER SUN

A West Vancouver doctor says new compact fluorescent bulbs may have "devastating" health implications for people with autoimmune diseases and is urging the federal government to slow down its campaign to eliminate traditional incandescent bulbs.

Family physician Dr. Janis McCaffrey, who suffers from lupus, is concerned about the possible dangers of CFLs for people with lupus or other autoimmune diseases.

"Health Canada has issued a warning on its website saying persons with lupus or other autoimmune diseases and certain skin conditions might be sensitive to ultraviolet radiation from CFLs. It says persons who believe they are suffering symptoms associated with UV should consult their doctor," she said.

"But I have been unable to find out any further information to either quantify or qualify what they are saying."

Ultraviolet light can trigger flares of lupus, she said.

Because of this, those with the disease should be told just how much adverse radiation they can expect from CFLs.

"There is nothing on the labeling that says anything about health risks, and the government has not informed doctors that patients with lupus or autoimmune diseases should be told about the risks," she said.

"What is the good of an online warning if nothing is printed on packaging or said to doctors?"

"There are over a million



People with autoimmune diseases might be sensitive to ultraviolet radiation from compact fluorescent light bulbs, Health Canada says on its website.

people in Canada who have autoimmune diseases, never mind the 100,000 to 150,000 with lupus," she said.

"I don't want my lupus to flare up because of these bulbs."

McCaffrey has contacted Health Canada in an attempt to access the research material that prompted the warning, but said Health Canada has been unable to answer her questions. "It's a terrifically erroneous statement to make if they can't back it up. If they are not sure, then do some testing,"

she said. McCaffrey said lupus is a disease that expresses itself "variably in every patient," which makes it almost impossible to determine how much light would trigger it.

"I get that, but if they say, 'We don't know,' then why is the government enforcing the use of these bulbs with no alternative? What are we supposed to do, hide in the dark?"

Health Canada official Leslie Meerburg said the reason there are no warning labels on CFL

packages is that the UV emissions of the bulbs are similar to those of a regular 60-watt incandescent bulb. She said a UV hazard assessment on the bulbs showed no significant risk of injury to eyes or skin when used at a distance of 30 centimetres for periods lasting less than three hours.

"Should there be reason for concern regarding safety with a CFL, Health Canada would investigate further, measuring the output of the device, and make specific recommendations

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**DR. JANIS McCAFFREY**  
FAMILY PHYSICIAN

to the manufacturer to correct any issues," said Meerburg.

McCaffrey said the potential consequences of the new light bulbs could be devastating.

"Do I have to see if I get sick and end up in hospital? I just about died the last time, of kidney failure."

[gbellett@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:gbellett@vancouver.sun.com)



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