

spray tan solution

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Spray Tan Solution

Dihydroxyacetone solution applied by airbrush or in an automated booth. Professional spray tanning gives the most even result available in sunless tanning — and it is the one application method where **FDA has issued a specific, repeated consumer warning**.

The FDA position, stated exactly

DHA is an approved colour additive for external application to the human body only.

FDA states explicitly that DHA is **not approved for application to the area of the eye, the lips, or mucous membranes**, and that its safety has not been established for **exposure of those areas or for inhalation**.

The agency's consumer guidance on spray tanning follows directly from that: when using a booth or a spray, **ask whether the eyes, lips and mucous membranes will be protected**, and if they will not, **consider whether the exposure is worthwhile**. Reputable operators supply and require:

- **Protective eyewear**
- **Nose plugs or a breath-hold instruction**

- **Lip balm as a barrier**
- **Ventilation and extraction**

That is not fussiness; it is the regulator's own advice, and the reason for it is that a spray booth is the one delivery method that puts DHA where the approval does not reach.

What the professional version gets right

- **Even coverage.** An experienced technician with an airbrush produces a result that is difficult to match at home, particularly across the back, the backs of the legs and the contours.
- **Depth and undertone are matched to the person** — DHA percentage from around 8% to 16%, and violet- or green-based tints to counteract orange.
- **Contouring.** Deeper solution shaded along muscle lines, used routinely in fitness and competition work.
- **Speed.** Ten minutes, developing over four to eight hours.

Preparing, and afterwards

Before: exfoliate 24 hours ahead with an oil-free scrub; shave or wax 24 hours ahead, not after; no moisturiser, deodorant, makeup or perfume on the day; loose dark clothing and open shoes.

After: do not shower for the stated development time — usually four to eight hours, sometimes overnight for a "rapid" solution left on longer for a deeper result. Then rinse in **water only**, no soap, no scrubbing. Pat dry. Avoid swimming, saunas, long hot baths and exfoliation. **Moisturise daily**, because the tan lasts exactly as long as the surface skin layer does — five to seven days.

And the reminder

It is not sun protection. A DHA tan has an SPF of roughly 3 at most, and someone who has just paid for a bronzed appearance is more likely to spend time in the sun, not less.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary category **(15) suntan preparations** — with **DHA regulated as a colour additive**, approved for **external application only** and expressly **not for the eye area, lips or mucous membranes**.

There is **no federal regulation of spray tan booths** as such. **Salon practice is regulated at state level** by cosmetology boards, and standards for eye and airway protection vary considerably. That gap is the practical reason FDA's advice is addressed to the consumer rather than to the operator.

A product with no sunscreen carries the **21 CFR 740.19 warning** that it does not protect against sunburn.

In the EU, DHA is permitted in cosmetics, and the **SCCS has assessed it specifically for spray application**, with conditions.

Shelf life

Six to twelve months, refrigerated where the manufacturer says so. Professional solution is

concentrated DHA in water, and **DHA degrades faster at high concentration, in heat and at the wrong pH** — a degraded solution sprays a weak, orange, uneven tan, which is a visible failure in a paid service.

Salons date their bottles for this reason. A solution that has darkened noticeably or developed a strong caramel-like smell should not be used.

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- [Sun and Tanning](#) — the shelf this sits on, and the rest of it.
- [Cosmetics](#) — what the label is legally allowed to say, and the full catalogue.
- The rest of *Sunless* — [Self-Tanner](#) · [Self-Tanning Mousse](#) · [Self-Tanning Drops](#) · [Gradual Tanning Lotion](#) · [Tanning Water](#) · [Tan Remover](#).
- [Indoor Tanning Lotion](#) — what tanning salons increasingly sell this instead of.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.