

Nail-Salon UV Lamps: Are They Safe?

You can always count on the tabloids for sensationalism, but one particular headline earlier this week sent shivers of fear through the beautysphere. "[Doc Warns That Popular Gel Manicure Is a Cancer Risk](#)" screamed the* New York Post* atop a story that likened the lamps in nail salons to cancer-causing indoor tanning beds. We contacted the doctor in question, NYU Medical School department of dermatology assistant professor Chris Adigun, and she welcomed the chance to set the record straight about an article that related some, but by no means all, of the information you need to know about UV nail lamps. "There is a risk, but the risk is small," she says—and there's certainly no reason to give up your gel manicures.

As any woman who has had one of the popular manicures knows, UV lamps are an essential step for curing the gel polish that can last for weeks. The problem is, the lamps emit UV light, and UV light does cause cancer (hence the idiocy of ever getting on a tanning bed). But there's a crucial difference in the amount of exposure you get at a nail salon. According to a 2012 report from Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, [it would take 250 years of weekly gel manicures to equal the exposure of one session with an FDA-approved UV phototherapy lamp](#), a device that doctors widely consider safe.

But that doesn't mean there's no risk at all at the nail salon. "There are certain people who are more susceptible to skin cancer than others, and unfortunately you don't know you are one of those people until you develop [it]," explains Adigun, an expert in nail disease. Here's her advice: Snip the ends off a pair of UV-protective gloves and slip them on before you put your hands under a UV lamp, or slather your hands with a broad-spectrum sunscreen after the nail technician has completed the massage and shaped your nails with a file. Or simply limit your exposure by alternating gels with traditional polish or having a gel manicure just once a month. Whatever precautions you choose, make sure to inspect your hands between applications of polish, which can mask problems below the nails.

"I'm not telling anyone not to get a gel manicure," says Adigun. "It's a great manicure and people get a result that can last for several weeks. But it's not perfect."

RELATED LINKS:

- [How Safe are Gel Manicures and Pedicures, Really?](#)
- [How Comfortable Should You Get in a Salon?](#)

- [Do You Match Your Manicure to Your Pedicure?](#)