

If You Get Gel Manicures, This Is What You Need To Know About UV Lamps And Skin Cancer



It's obvious that spending hours out in the blazing summer sun is going to end in skin damage, especially [if you're not taking precautions](#) and protecting yourself. You probably don't think about [skin cancer](#) when you hit up the nail salon for a fresh set of gels, though, right? Well, according to dermatology experts, you should.

UVA rays are what cure gel manicures. These UV rays are known primarily for their role in photoaging of the skin (think: sun spots and wrinkles). They also contribute to skin cancer —[tanning booths](#) emit mostly UVA rays, and we know that even one session of fake-baking ups your skin cancer risk by leaps and bounds. And while hard evidence that they do the same thing when you rest your hands under the UV lamp is lacking, some doctors are sounding a warning.

When gel manicures first became popular, "research lagged behind technology," [Chris G. Adigun, M.D.](#), a board-certified dermatologist who specializes in nail disorders, general

dermatology, and cosmetic dermatology, tells SELF. Adigun also wrote a [revised physician's statement](#) on the issue this year for the American Academy of Dermatology. Though the polish style has been around for years, no one really looked into its safety until a couple years ago. And even then, it was very minimal. "I presented on the research in 2013 and there were only two studies," Adigun says. "One was wholly funded by the nail cosmetics industry."

Over the past few years, there have been more studies and anecdotal evidence that have given experts cause for concern.

In 2014, a [small study](#) found that the UV radiation emitted from different gel lamps varied greatly. Adigun notes that this study also found that it would take just 12 visits to the salon for DNA skin damage to be detectable. Most gel devotees could easily reach those 12 visits in just six months. This estimate also relies on meticulous use of the lamps—never exceeding eight minutes total for one full manicure application. That's hardly what happens in a normal setting, where manicurists would prefer to over-cure the polish than accidentally under-cure and have an unhappy customer.

Another [early study](#) compared six commonly used curing lamps—a mix of fluorescent and LED—and found that while the irradiance (or strength of rays emitted) varied, they all fell into what the official lamp-rating agency considers the highest risk level allowable for general, unsupervised use. Adigun points out that this doesn't even take into consideration that some people can be more sensitive to light than your average mani adherent because of things like genetics or medications. She adds that it's a common misconception that LED nail lights emit less UV radiation than fluorescents.

"UVA irradiance or strength emitted by nail lamps whether fluorescent or LED is at least four times stronger than UVA from normal sunlight," Adigun says. The problem, though, is that there are still no studies that show that UV nail lamps directly cause skin cancer. "Do we have data that this causes cancer? No. But do we know that UVA exposure causes cancer? Yes."

Skin cancer aside, there's also a cosmetic aspect. "The tops of the hands are very cosmetically sensitive area, and we know that repeated exposure to UVA accelerates photoaging," Adigun says. How ironic that a side effect of making hands look prettier may be that they age prematurely.

You don't have to give up your beloved gels—staying safe under UV lamps is surprisingly easy.

Though there are risks, **Adigun** is pro-gels. In fact, she says she's seen gel manicures change some patients' lives. Those with disfiguring nail diseases that otherwise stopped them from going to work or seeking interpersonal relationships may turn to gel to camouflage their conditions, feel confident, and take their lives back. "I cannot imagine the world without gels for some of my patients," she says. Gel manicures are also more cost-efficient and give better results than normal polish—there's no arguing that.

Instead of motioning to taking away gels, **Adigun** has made it her mission to evaluate every sun-protective option out there. Her top reco? [YouVeeShield](#), fingerless gloves made out of a special polymer that has titanium dioxide, a component of many sunscreens, woven into it. They're one-size-fits-all, don't require washing (just a quick wipe if it gets greasy), and work on both hands and feet, for both women and men. You can also just cut the fingers out of regular gloves, or apply SPF lotion to the backs of your hands before your mani. Just be sure to avoid the nails—you don't want to go through all that trouble to get a safer manicure just to have it fail to cure correctly.

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