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I LOVE my Gel Manicures! But should I worry?

PUBLISHED ON *March 23, 2016* *March 23, 2016* by *jackiedosal*

I LOVE my gel manicures! Lasting at least two weeks, gel manicures have finally made my pincers look pretty! Like many of you, I had been wondering about the safety about the UV lamps that are used to cure the gel manicures. They seem fairly benign, but there has been some press (<http://archderm.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=711988>) questioning its safety.

When I read a recent issue of JAMA Dermatology (<http://archderm.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1862050>), I was relieved to read that the authors concluded that the risk of skin cancer was very very low with gel/UV manicures, even with regular use. This is what I suspected, so I stopped worrying. Additionally, my salon recently introduced an LED nail lamp, which also *seemingly* solved the issue of the UV lamp.

Well, imagine my surprise when this topic came up again at the most recent American Academy of Dermatology Annual Meeting. Nail expert Dr. Chris Adigun reopened my concerns about the safety of UV lights. She argued that the lamps are notoriously variable in their UV exposure, nail salons hardly ever follow manufacturer recommendations, and that the UV exposure is more than we previously thought.



This really left me conflicted, since I adore my gel manicures, and I really hadn't prepared myself to abandon them anytime soon. So I took it upon myself to read through all the relevant articles on the subject (I hate taking someone else's word for it). Luckily, several groups have studied a variety of nail lamps, with a variety of hand positioning and exposure times.

Here's the summary:

The amount of UV exposure is WAY below anything close to skin-cancer-causing levels.

Here are a few other important take-away points:

- Out of 72,709 women (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2133.2012.11107.x/abstract;jsessionid=A31FAA65F9DFA20DFE494F0ACBA81751.f01t03>) getting regular manicures for 60 years (assuming generous exposure times), only one woman would develop skin cancer who wouldn't otherwise (in statistics, this is called the "number needed to harm").
- It would take 250 years (<http://www.jidonline.org/article/S0022-202X%2815%2936202-3/abstract>) of weekly gel manicures to equal that of a therapeutic phototherapy session that I commonly prescribe for psoriasis (15–30 treatments over 5–10 weeks). (Yes, phototherapy is often UVB, rather than UVA, but this JID study measured UV dose in J/cm², and gives a risk comparison to something we already know to be safe).

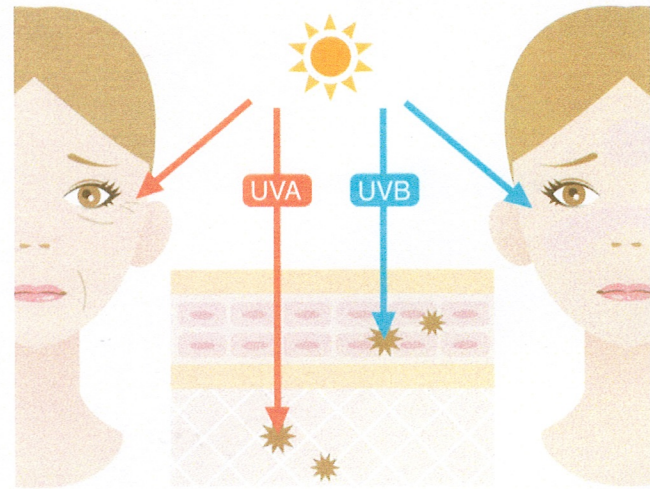
From a skin cancer perspective, the risk of skin cancer from nail curing lamps is very low. However, it is important to note that ALL lamps used to cure gel manicures emit UVA radiation, even the LED lamps. Despite the lack of "UV" in the name, LED lamps are actually *more* intense than UV lamps and emit *more* UVA.

As a quick review: **UVB** rays cause sunburn and skin cancer, while **UVA** rays penetrate deeper into the skin, causing skin aging, cell damage, sun spots, and wrinkles by breaking down collagen and elastin (and to a lesser degree than UVB, also contribute to skin cancer).

UVA radiation is responsible for the brown spots ("liver" spots or "sun" spots) on your **grandmother's hands**, as well as the wrinkles and crepiness of the

UVA penetrates deep into the skin to affect collagen and elastin, causing wrinkling,

skin.



blotchiness, and poor skin tone.

There's nothing worse than a youthful face that has been preserved with good skin care, but "old" looking hands.

While the risk of skin cancer is much less than ambient exposure to natural sunlight, the cumulative effects of UVA exposure can result in discoloration and premature aging of the skin.



Preserve and Protect your well-earned beauty.

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- YouVee (<http://www.youveeshield.com>) sunshields are currently crowdfunding – they are very cheap disposable hand protectors that block 99% of all UV radiation. Wouldn't it be great if salons started carrying these?



In summary, I'm going to keep getting my gel manicures (thank goodness)!

For many of us women on-the-go, the gel manicure is here to stay! Just be sure to protect those hands! And as with anything, it's good to take a break once in a while from manicures to give your nails a breather.

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