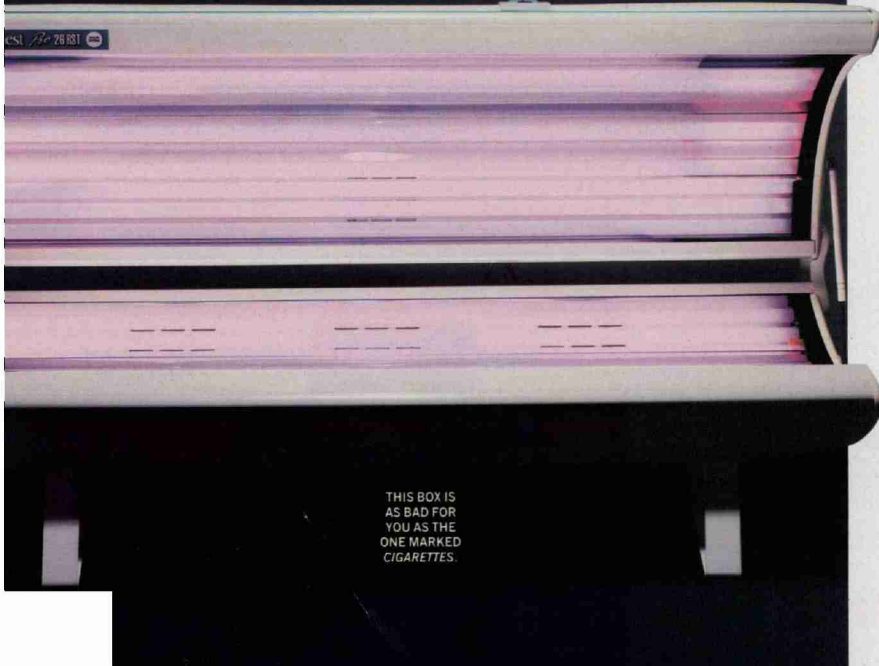


REPORT

WHY
 THE HELL
 ARE
 TANNING
 BEDS
 ON
 CAMPUS?

You can't buy tobacco at most colleges, but many are making it easy to get a tan...and cancer.

BY JANET LEE



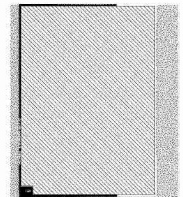
EVERY MORNING, Kara Waite sees women entering the tanning salon next to her local coffee shop, not far from Tufts University and Bunker Hill Community College, where Waite, 32, is a professor. It fills her with rage. "I want to shake them and yell, 'Stop! It's not worth losing your health!'" She knows the danger all too well.

She started tanning at 15 and continued while at the University of Arizona. "There was a salon walking distance from our sorority house," she recalls. "I was a bit overweight, so the idea was if you can't tone it, tan it."

Four years ago, doctors told Waite she had melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. It was stage IIIB. Stage IV is the worst. Today, with a 5-inch scar on her neck where a mole was excised (the lymph nodes in her right armpit were removed too), she knows there's about a 50 percent chance the cancer will return...and likely be untreatable. Her doctor told her it was almost certainly a result of indoor tanning. "I did this to myself," she says.

Rates of melanoma have doubled since 1985, according to a new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report. Young women are highly at risk—it's the most common cancer in women ages 25 to 29—perhaps because they flock to tanning salons. More than 419,000 cases of skin cancer in the U.S. are linked to indoor tanning annually,

FROM LEFT: CLAIRE BENOIST/THELICENSINGPROJECT.COM; SIMON WILKINSON/GETTY IMAGES.



and a 2013 study in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that one-third of 16- to 25-year-old non-hispanic white women fake tan (not the safe spray kind) at least once a year. It's just so freakin' easy. According to *JAMA Dermatology*, several million young adults have access to indoor tanning facilities on—not just near—their college campuses or for free in their off-campus apartment buildings.

Last year, researchers looked at indoor tanning at the country's top 125 colleges and found that 12 percent of schools had on-campus tanning facilities. At 42 percent, there were off-campus student housing facilities boasting tanning beds that, in many cases, were free and unrestricted. Fifteen percent referred students via the school website to housing with on-site tanning. And at more than 14 percent of schools, students could use campus debit cards for not just textbooks, food, and laundry but tanning too.

Tanning beds were condoned even at colleges with a tobacco-free policy or a school of public health. "People take tanning more lightly than they do smoking, but not a lot of people are dying at 25 from lung cancer," says study author Sherry L. Pagoto, PhD, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Per the International Agency for Research on Cancer, tobacco and UV radiation are equally carcinogenic.

"It's the schools' job to educate and protect students, and they're send-



ing a mixed message by making access to these dangerous beds easy," says dermatologist Julie Karen, MD, a spokesperson for the Skin Cancer Foundation. "They're saying it's acceptable."

COSMO REACHED OUT to 34 of the colleges highlighted in Pagoto's study for comment. We heard back from 20. About two-thirds of those are making positive changes. Rutgers, the University of Northern Arizona, the University of Mississippi, Western Kentucky University, Georgia Southern University, and Ohio State University all said they have banned or will be banning on-campus tanning or the use of campus cards to pay for it. A rep for Marquette University confirmed that there is a facility nearby that offers tanning payable with the Marquette Cash card but that the school is considering eliminating this during the next round of negotiations.

Other schools don't appear to believe it warrants action. Rochester Institute of Technology, for example, has a tan-

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ning bed in a privately owned facility on campus, but a spokesperson said the issue "hadn't come up"—i.e., nobody complained. Penn State officials said they don't believe in banning services just because they may be harmful but prefer to educate coeds about potential dangers. (The university did not answer queries on how it is doing so.) Miami University's MU Bucks program is primarily for use at off-campus vendors, including a tanning salon, and is run by a private company. Although accounts are tied to students' ID cards, a spokesperson said the school doesn't endorse merchants in the MU Bucks program...yet it does prohibit using the card to buy alcohol.

Abby Fox, 19, a sophomore at the University of Louisville, says that most of her sorority sisters tan regularly (she notes there are tanning beds in a laundry room

on campus) and there's a sense among her friends that being pale is "gross."

But Fox is seeing early signs of skin damage from her tanning habit. "I started as a junior in high school. I felt in competition to be the tannest at prom," she says. "Then I kept it up because I thought I looked better. Now I can feel the skin on my forehead getting loose and see faint outlines of wrinkles." (Ninety percent of signs of aging, like wrinkles, brown spots, and sagging, are due to UV exposure, Dr. Karen notes.) Fox wants to cut back on tanning but says it's hard—she likes the way it makes her look.

Salons appeal to our vanity by promoting what many women incorrectly believe is a healthy glow. They claim using tanning beds boost vitamin D, but according to the Skin Cancer Foundation, the beds primarily emit UVA rays, which don't stimulate D production. Says Pagoto, "There's a lack of education."

"Colleges offer amenities like tanning because students demand them," says Barmak Nassirian, director of policy analysis at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. "But the issue is absolutely legitimate. I expect that a year from now, you'll have a hard time finding institutions that affiliate with tanning salons." Good news: There's hope for the class of 2019. ■

Want to Make Sure Tanning Isn't Okay at Your Alma Mater?

Tell your university president! This year, the Skin Cancer Foundation launched the Campaign to Stop College Tanning. Head to SkinCancer.org to send a letter to these colleges, asking them to ban access on campus.