Study Finds Mothers Introduce Teens To Tanning Beds

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Anyone who has watched *Mean Girls* the requisite 5 million times can probably recite Amy Poehler's tongue-in-cheek one-liner: "I'm not a regular mom. I'm a cool mom." But Mrs. George's offers of condoms and mocktails were tame (and infinitely safer than their alternatives) in comparison to one very real-life trend reported by *JAMA Dermatology*: about 45 percent of American teens under the age of 16 are first taken to an indoor tanning salon by a relative. And for more than half of teen girls (and a lower percentage of teen boys), their mother is that relative.

Now, when you look at the data, that comes out to about two dozen teens, out of 4,127 people surveyed. It's not that much, you might think. But when you consider that the risk of death is quite real, even two dozen is too many. "We're seeing melanomas in younger and younger patients," says New York City dermatologist Gary Goldenberg. "They're the most alarming because that kind of skin cancer is deadly."

Goldenberg says he has seen patients as young as their early 20s with this kind of cancer — but notes that the harmful effects of tanning bed use linger, even if it doesn't turn into cancer right off the bat. "We know that it's cumulative mutations that make cells more likely to transform from just sun-damaged cells to ones that are malignant, and could potentially kill somebody," he says. And since research has shown that indoor tanning (and its endorphin release) is addictive, starting earlier often means you'll just have more of those cancer-causing mutations. "Obviously, if your parents are more genetically likely to get skin cancer, you're more likely to get skin cancer," Goldenberg says. "This study clearly demonstrates that people tend to pick up learned behaviors, like using a tanning bed or going to the beach and not using sunscreen, from their parents, too."

As always, our best is advice when to comes to tanning is faking it. Ace your next self-tanner application with our comprehensive how-to.