

Tanning trends rise despite risks

By: Molly Shanks

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Despite warnings of skin cancer, an increasing number of tanning salons are popping up in cities across the country, including Oxford.

Joni Mayer, professor at the Graduate School of Public Health at San Diego State University, conducted a study in 2006 to investigate areas with a large number of tanning salons-in some places outnumbering Starbucks-and possible reasons for their popularity.

Mayer found despite warnings of skin cancer, premature aging and other side effects, many people continue to tan.

"I don't think the message is really affecting people yet and for a lot of young people, skin cancer is something far off in the distant future," Mayer said. "They are more concerned with getting a tan than the long term effects."

Although many people simply like the way a tan looks, Mayer said the location and availability of tanning salons in an area also plays a role in usage.

According to Mayer's study, tanning salons appear to be more popular in areas with lower ultraviolet index score and higher percentages of Caucasians.

The study concluded that of the 6,000 teens surveyed, 76 percent lived within two miles of a tanning salon.

"If they (teens) lived near a tanning salon, they were more likely to have used it in the past year," Mayer said.

This could be the case in Oxford, where at least five tanning salons can be found within a short drive, compared with only two uptown coffee shops, Starbucks and Kofenya.

"I definitely believe in supply and demand," said Rose Marie Ward, assistant professor of kinesiology and health at Miami University. "If people weren't using tanning salons here they definitely wouldn't be in business."

Mayer said she supports stricter laws as one way to limit the amount tanning salon usage. She suggested

prohibiting those under 18 from tanning.

Cincinnati Tan in Oxford already has some restrictions in place, according to manager Katie Carson. Those under the age of 18 are not allowed to tan without a parent signature at the salon.

Despite these restrictions, Mayer said she would like to see certain laws and regulations passed throughout the country to restrict tanning habits.

"We want to prevent (problems) before things get any worse." Mayer said. "We don't want to wait like they did with tobacco to see how many people are dying from it."

Ward said ignorance of the effects of tanning mirrors other dangerous effects caused by risky behaviors.

"I think people know the effects and they just like the look of a tan," Ward said. "It's kind of like people know effects of alcohol and they just go ahead and drink."

Carson said despite potential long-term consequences of tanning, there are some health benefits.

"Tanning makes people feel good," Carson said. "You get vitamin D you can't get from sunlight if you don't have time to lay out in the sun."

The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) refutes Carson's point, stating although indoor tanning beds do provide the benefits of vitamin D, the risk for skin cancer is too great.

The AAD suggests people concerned with getting sufficient vitamin D should take vitamin supplements or eat foods containing high amounts of vitamin D.