

Tanning salons cluster in gay neighborhoods in large US cities, study finds

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Neighborhoods with high proportions of gay and bisexual men are twice as likely to have an indoor tanning salon than neighborhoods with fewer sexual minority men, according to a study by researchers at the Stanford

University School of Medicine.

The finding suggests the possibility that the tanning industry may be targeting gay and [bisexual men](#), who are six times more likely than heterosexual men to tan indoors during their lifetimes and about twice as likely to suffer from skin cancer.

"If tanning facilities are available right next to your home, you're probably more likely to use them," said Eleni Linos, MD, MPH, professor of dermatology, who sees patients at Stanford Health Care's dermatology clinic at Hoover Pavillion. "Our concern is whether the tanning industry is targeting high-risk communities, similar to how the [tobacco industry](#) has done in the past, marketing to [vulnerable groups](#)."

Linus is the senior author of the study, which will be published online Oct. 4 in *JAMA Open Network*. The lead author is graduate student Rebecca Chen.

The study used [census data](#) paired with business locations in neighborhoods in the 10 U.S. cities with the largest numbers of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender residents, including San Francisco and Los Angeles. The researchers used self-reported male-male households as a proxy for the prevalence of sexual minority men in each neighborhood.

They found that neighborhoods in which male-male households accounted for at least 10% of the total unmarried households were twice as likely to include an indoor tanning salon than those in which fewer than 10% of the households were male-male, even after correcting for socioeconomic differences, including income and race.

'No benefit to indoor tanning'

The findings surprised and concerned the researchers.

"Indoor tanning is a class 1 carcinogen," Linos said. "I don't think we can be naïve and think of this as just another business. There's no benefit to indoor tanning. Because we are already seeing very high rates of [skin cancer](#) in this community, we need to be particularly vigilant about industry influence."

The researchers intend to launch a new effort in conjunction with Stanford's PRIDE Study—a long-term study of sexual and gender minority health—to investigate the marketing and advertising efforts of the tanning industry. But regardless of the outcome, they warn that indoor [tanning](#) is not safe and note that one way to curtail its use is to reduce its availability.

"Your built environment has a tremendous influence on your health in both positive and negative ways," Linos said. "As public health researchers and advocates, we are committed to improving people's health. By supporting healthier [neighborhoods](#), we have the potential to benefit the [health](#) of an entire community."

Provided by Stanford University Medical Center

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