



Think getting your tan at a tanning salon is safer than getting one outdoors? It's probably worse than you think. There are significant dangers to the skin and body associated with tanning bed use, and new research has shown that it presents a higher risk of cancer than originally thought.

As part of the health care overhaul this year, the Obama administration imposed a 10 percent tax on indoor tanning services. With the money earned from this tax, the government hopes to reduce the risk of cancer associated with the practice of salon tanning.

Tanning beds, like the sun, emit both Ultraviolet A (UVA) and Ultraviolet B (UVB) rays that are damaging to the skin. UVB rays cause burns and UVA penetrates the skin to create a tan. However, according to a report by the CBS Evening News, the UVA rays in tanning beds can be 12 times stronger than those of the sun.

"Tanning represents the skin's response to sun damage," said Dr. Joseph Greco, director of dermatology and dermatologic surgery at UCLA Santa Monica. "Even though you might feel as though your skin looks healthier, the UV radiation causes damage the skin's DNA and collagen underneath the surface... and this damage is cumulative."

Additionally, last July, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) placed tanning beds in the "carcinogenic to humans" category, the category for the highest cancer risk. The IARC revealed that there was a strong association between indoor tanning and two types of skin cancer: squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma, the latter being one of the deadliest and most preventable forms of cancer.

According to the IARC, those who practice indoor tanning before the age of 30 increase their risk of getting melanoma by 75 percent. Women ages 20 to 29, a primary consumer of tanning services, should be aware that melanoma is the second most common form of cancer in their demographic, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

"All people, regardless of their skin type or color are at risk for developing skin cancer and the more you tan, the greater your risk becomes," Greco said.

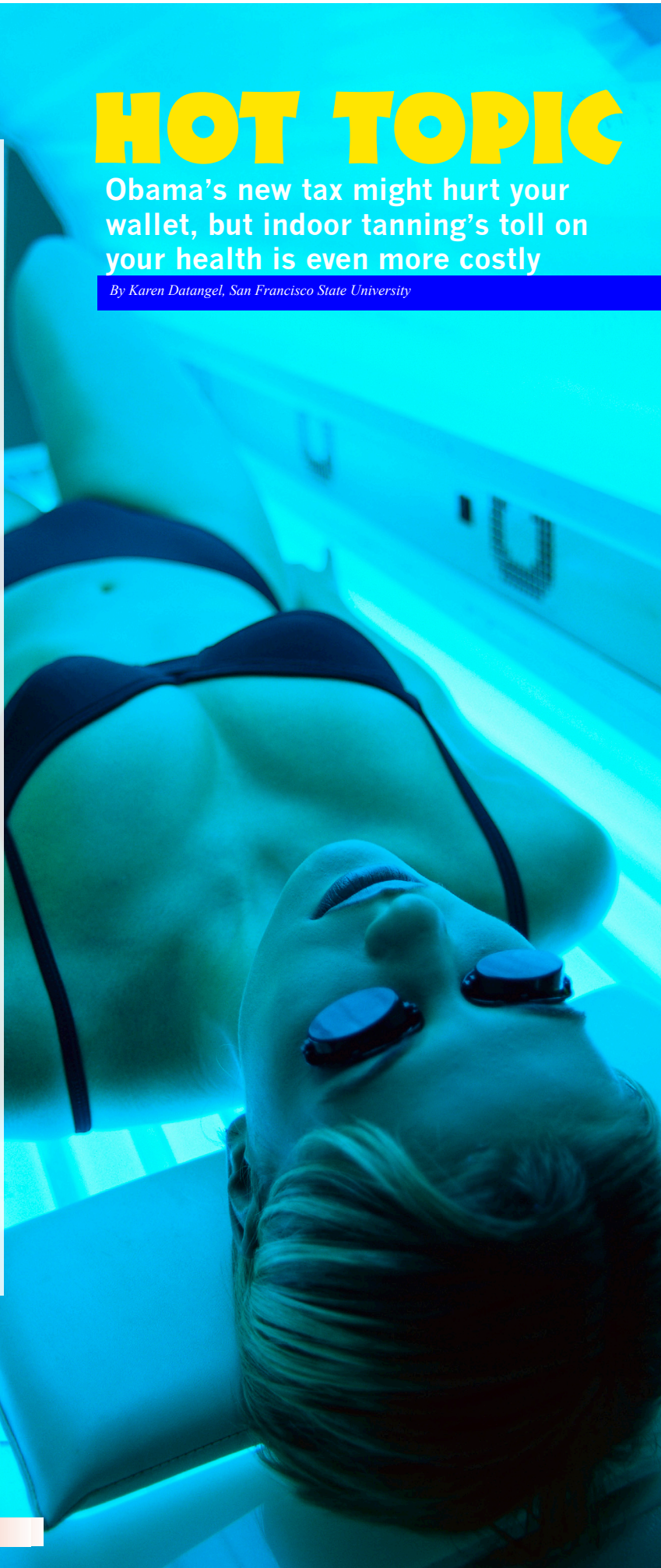
Other than skin cancer, tanning can cause premature aging of the skin, immune suppression from UVB radiation, irreversible damage to the eyes, and allergic reactions. Greco said that signs of aging could appear early in your twenties.

Greco suggested alternatives to get that healthy, tanned skin look, such as using over-the-counter products like lotions, gels, creams, sprays, foams and towelettes. Professional spray tans at spas are also available as an alternative to the harmful tanning bed.

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By Karen Datangel, San Francisco State University



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