

Shining a Light on Tanning Bed Bulbs

Tanning bed bulbs are probably one of the most critical components of your business. You may have the slickest indoor tanning facilities, the best tanning beds and the hottest lotions, but if your bulbs aren't up to scratch, your customers simply won't get the tan they want.

That said, tanning lamps are a huge investment, so how do you choose the right tanning bed bulbs? And once you've made your choice, how do you care for and maintain them? It's not that easy, which is why I've put together a breakdown of the differences between the various types of tanning bed lamps and some guidelines on how to keep your indoor tanning bulbs working at maximum efficiency.

Different Types of Indoor Tanning Lamps Low Pressure Indoor Tanning Lamps

You may know these as fluorescent lamps and yes, they contain mercury. So, you will need to dispose of them properly once they're done working. Low pressure tanning lamps work by discharging gas that excites a stream of electrons, emitting ultraviolet radiation and then causing the phosphorous coating on the lamp tube to light up.

RUV-A Indoor Tanning Lamps

RUV-A lamps are also known as reflector lamps. This type of tanning bed lamp has an internal reflective coating that focuses all of the UV light output to the front of the lamp, reducing the total tanning time and increasing the UV output.

High Output Indoor Tanning Lamps

HO (high output) lamps and VHO (very high output) lamps, work on an 80 to 160-watt ballast and are the most common type of lamp of indoor tanning beds. VHOs are typically found in stand-up beds.

This category also includes high-pressure lamps (metal halide lamps), and though small, these quartz lamps emit an incredible amount of ultraviolet light.

When comparing lamps, are the UV-B percentages and ratios important?

When you divide the UV-B energy of a lamp by the total UV-A and UV-B output, you get what's often referred to as the UV-B ratio. A number of tanning bed and lamp manufacturers will throw these numbers at you, but the truth is, it doesn't actually show the true output of the lamp.

And what about the Te and Tm ratings? Are they important?

Because the UV-B ratio doesn't really tell us much, the FDA uses a much more intricate system using Te and Tm ratings. Te is essentially how long it takes an indoor tanning lamp to produce a sunburn, this is called the minimal erythemal dose (MED) and it's the maximum amount of time allowed per indoor tanning session. Tm is how long it takes the lamp to stimulate tanning, or melanogenesis.

How do I know when to replace tanning lamps and which brands are compatible?

First, let me say that if you're an ETS Tan customer, you can always call us with a question and we can help walk you through the answer, whether it's troubleshooting a bed or deciding if it's time to replace a lamp.

Lamps should be replaced once they've lost about 25-30% of their original output. At that point, they're simply not effective and you're letting your customers down. One way to keep an eye on your lamps is to meter them on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. When taking a reading, let the equipment warm up first and always try to take the reading in the same place every time. To make it easier, keep a lamp log next to each bed to track your readings and results.

If you're replacing a lamp on your own, make sure the replacement is FDA-compatible with the original lamp, meaning it must have the same Tm and Te ratings and can't affect the exposure time of the equipment. Luckily, most lamps will say which lamps they can or can't replace.

But remember, as an ETS Tan customer, you can always call us for technical help or assistance ordering replacement parts for your indoor tanning beds. We'll be here for you