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Keeping It Clean

Medical experts share tips on keeping services sanitized, sterile and safe.

Years ago, Amy Newburger, a New York-based dermatologist in private practice and senior attending physician at St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital, found herself at a job where she noticed some disturbing "sterilization" processes. She promptly brought up the issue to supervisors—and later ended up quitting when it wasn't fixed. Now Newburger shares her experiences to emphasize that if poor sterilization practices can exist in the medical community, it's safe to assume that they can exist in salons—whether through a desire to cut corners or by simply not knowing the proper procedures. "I think a lot of salons are under the misconception that they're sterile, but they're not; even in the medical community, there's a certain amount of ignorance," says Newburger. "But [when working] with warts and hepatitis, there are too many things that you can transmit to take any risks."

We spoke to Newburger and other medical professionals for some valuable advice on how a salon should regard proper sanitization (cleaning) and sterilization (killing living microorganisms).

Instrumental Knowledge

Techs must take some basic but crucial steps to ensure that they're providing clean and safe services. Stacy Mobley, a naturopathic doctor based in Atlanta, stresses washing hands between clients, including scrubbing under the nails with a clean nail brush since bacteria and germs can hide there; she also suggests wearing gloves during services. "HPV is on the rise, and warts are spread by skin-to-skin contact," she notes. "Gloves prevent this from being spread from client to client, or even from client to tech." She adds that the salon must vigilantly clean pumice stones used to remove dead skin or that clients bring in their own.

Richard K. Scher, professor of dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical College and a nail specialist in New York, recommends that his patients visit

a salon on a regular basis and that they purchase their own sets of instruments to take to salons to cut down on risks. Reusable instruments can be top carriers of bacteria, fungi and viruses if they're not sterilized properly between clients. As a tech, you might recommend to clients who are concerned about cross-contamination that they buy a set of tools they can take home with them or keep at the salon. However, it must be stressed that the clients sanitize their tools at home between each use. Dirty tools, whether they live at the salon or in the client's home, are still a source of contamination. Scher notes that clients can sterilize their metal tools by letting them sit in boiling water for 15 to 20 minutes before each appointment. Disposable files and buffers are also a great salon tool—one use and they're done. Plus, they can make a savvy marketing take-home

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"The manufacturer should also provide guidelines on how to check if the equipment is still in working order."



gift for the client, helping her remember your salon.

When sterilizing reusable metal instruments, you'll want to check the specifications of the procedure—know the recommended time of exposure for disinfecting liquids or machines, such as autoclaves.

"An instrument has to stay in solution for a certain period of time—a quick dip won't do—and the solution should be changed twice daily," recommends Newburger.

"Before sanitizing, scrub the instrument clean, and not with just soap and water. Use a jewelry sonicator, since alcohol can dull the edges of metal instruments and shorten the life of your nippers and clippers." After scrubbing thoroughly, heating the instrument will do a great job of killing spores and viruses, such as warts and hepatitis, or you can submerge it in a disinfectant solution for the amount of time recommended by the manufacturer.

While autoclaves are expensive, they can be highly effective in salons. "Good practices can involve an autoclave, which uses high temperature and high pressure to kill microbes and microorganisms that can cause infections," explains Scher.

"Some sterilizing chemicals are also considered effective." Mobley adds that UV light can kill bacteria and viruses by damaging bacterial DNA—meaning that it can't replicate and cause infection. But after exposing instruments to UV light for 25 to 30 minutes, she recommends rinsing off the instrument because though the bacteria are dead, they're still present on the tool.

Finally, make sure your autoclave, UV lights and/or disinfectant solutions are

productive by following manufacturer guidelines and asking questions about proper use. Newburger recommends that for any machines you might buy, inquire about what microbes it has been tested to kill. "By national law, we as doctors have to show that our autoclaves can kill certain organisms, including fungal infections, TB/staph microbes, etc.," she says. "The manufacturer should also provide guidelines on how to check if the equipment is still in working order." After three to five years of use, bulbs may wear out, for example, so ask about how the machine can be tested for effectiveness over time.

Footspa Solutions

Pedicure tubs are a notorious resting spot for bacteria, fungi and viruses—and unclean tubs have made headline news and even been implicated in deaths. Thus, it's a crucial part of any salon's everyday activities to ensure that they are impeccably maintained. "For tubs, you want to clean, drain and disinfect between clients and at the end of the day," says Tony Nakhla, dermatologist, medical director of the OC Skin Institute, and author of *The Skin Commandments: 10 Rules to Healthy, Beautiful Skin*. "Draining and flushing to sanitize prevents spreading fungal infections, such as athlete's foot."

Newburger relates that the type of pedicure spa can make a difference when it comes to ease of cleanup and disinfection, i.e., the "continual-flow type versus the basin/jacuzzi-propeller type. The kind with water circulating in the pipe and re-entering the tub is harder to clean," she explains. "If it looks like a sink, with



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When it comes to proper sanitization and sterilization within your salon, it's your reputation on the line.



a drain in the bottom and a closed system, it's easier to clean." Disinfecting the surfaces with Lysol or sodium hypochlorite solution (bleach) is a must between appointments, Newburger adds.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides the following guidelines for cleaning pedicure tubs: After each client, drain water and remove debris; clean with soap or detergent, then rinse with clean water and drain; disinfect surfaces with an EPA-registered disinfectant and leave on for 10 minutes or for the manufacturer's recommended time; drain and rinse with clean water. (For whirlpool foot spas, air-jet basins, pipeless and other circulating foot spas, disinfect by filling the basin with clean water, adding the appropriate amount of liquid disinfectant, and turning on the unit to circulate the disinfectant for the entire contact time.) Then, nightly, for circulating spas, remove the filter

screen, inlet jets and all other removable parts from the basin and clean out any debris trapped behind or in them; scrub these parts with a brush and soap or disinfectant; rinse the removed parts with clean water and place them back into the basin apparatus; fill the basin with clean water and add an EPA-registered hospital disinfectant following label directions; and turn the unit on to circulate the liquid for 10 minutes, or the label-indicated time. (The whirlpool mechanism of the tub must be operating for the entire disinfection period so that the piping and internal components that contain hidden bacteria are disinfected.) After disinfection, drain, rinse and air dry. For simple basins, the EPA recommends the following procedure: Drain the basin and remove any visible debris; scrub the bowl with a clean brush and soap or disinfectant; rinse and drain; disinfect basin surfaces with an EPA-registered hospital disinfectant following manufacturer's instructions (again, surfaces must remain wet with the disinfectant for 10 minutes or the contact time stated on the label); then drain the basin, rinse with clean water, and let air-dry.

Sterilization Facts*

- Right-handed people tend to wash their left hand more thoroughly than their right hand, and visa versa.
- People have between 2 and 10 million bacteria between their fingertips and elbow.
- Damp hands spread 1,000 times more germs than dry hands.
- Germs can live on hands for up to three hours.
- Millions of germs hide under watches and bracelets, and there could be as many germs under your ring as there are people in Europe.

*Source: Maine Medical Center (mmc.org)

When it comes to proper sanitization and sterilization within your salon, it's your reputation on the line. A slip-up can result in fines, salon closure, lawsuits and even death. Don't take a chance when it comes to knowing the proper procedures to keep your clients—and your salon—safe from harm. ↓

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