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The nail file

Studies warn of disease germs at your fingertips

By Debra Melani, Rocky Mountain News
January 21, 2003

Thousands of women do it: walk into a salon with humdrum nails and emerge with a set so long and intimidating that they would make the toughest alley cat shudder.

No harm in that, right?

There could be, if the number of nail salons Kevin Heupel finds violating sanitation regulations is any indication.

Heupel's office inspects fewer than 5 percent of the 5,000 salons it oversees, "but when we do, we generally find the nail shops not in compliance with a number of sanitation regulations," said Heupel, program director for Colorado's Office of Barber and Cosmetologist Licensing.

Because blood can be shed during overzealous cuticle cutting and fingernails can harbor scores of germs, experts warn that problems as diverse as hepatitis and fungal infections are potential threats.

No cases of blood-borne infections from manicures or pedicures have been documented in the United States, where the nail industry is a \$6 billion-a-year business. But with nail-salon regulation far from foolproof, consumers should be aware of the potential hazards, experts say.

"(Nail technicians) should be cleaning and disinfecting between each client," Heupel said. "That's something we don't see very often when we go out to the shops."



Steven G. Smith © News

Master nail technician Mark Fallos works on the nails of Renee Schmidt at Salon Armand in Denver. Experts say nail techs should clean and disinfect between each client to protect against infections. Fallos adheres to the standards, plucking tools out of a hospital-grade disinfectant before each procedure.

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When Mark Fallos does nails, he carefully plucks each tool out of a bright blue liquid bath of hospital-grade disinfectant for each procedure.

All tools should be stainless steel or disposable, said the nail technician at Salon Armand in Denver, who files and buffs using a soft emery board that he then promptly pitches into the trash.

It's not cheap, which is why some discount salons might be cutting corners, but it's worth it, Fallos said, referring to a recent court case.

A jury awarded a Westminster woman \$3.75 million in May after she claimed that unsterile equipment was used on her at the Top Nails salon in Aurora and she contracted herpes.

While painful allergic reactions to nail products are the most common problem dermatologists see, infections periodically show up, particularly yeast and fungal problems, said Dr. Robert Dellavalle, assistant professor of dermatology at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

Some infections can be permanently disfiguring and expensive and difficult to treat, he said.

melanid@RockyMountainNews.com or (303) 892-2301.

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