Beauty salon health risks? [1]

Dear Alice,

When you go to a beauty salon for a manicure, pedicure, waxing, whatever, where you're likely to be poked and prodded by various implements during the service, how much of a risk are you running of picking up a communicable disease?

Signed,

What Price Beauty?

Answer

Dear What Price Beauty?,

The risk of contracting a communicable disease from a beauty salon procedure is very small. However, if a beauty salon does not dispose of single use items or properly clean and disinfect instruments, there is potential for transmission of blood-borne pathogens. While the likelihood of infections at a beauty salon is minimal, if you were to contract something, it would most likely be a fungal or bacterial infection of the manipulated area. Here are some tips to help you avoid getting an infection at the beauty salon, spa, or other place you go to primp:

Check for licensing: Make sure that the salon professionals you see are licensed, including your manicurist, pedicurist, waxer, etc. If a license is not on display, then ask the salon professional to show you her/his professional license before starting. If no license is presented, opt for another beauty salon instead.

Get a feel for the beauty salon. Inspect the area carefully before getting serviced. The following list of questions can help guide you:

- Is the general overall appearance of the beauty salon tidy and sanitary?
- Are the supplies clean and orderly?
- Are instruments immersed or stored in a disinfectant solution in front of the client immediately before use?
- Is the disinfectant clear and free of debris?
- Do the towels look fresh and clean?
- Are paper towels and other disposable supplies such as cotton and sponge applicators only used once?
- Are the operators performing waxing or extractions wearing gloves?
Are finger bowls, pedicure bowls, and footbaths cleaned, rinsed and disinfected after each use?
Is the trash properly discarded in covered wastebaskets?
Is the working environment smoke-free and well lit?
Do the beauty salon employees wash their hands right before attending to each client and/or service?
Are customers asked to wash up as well?
Are new emery boards, block buffers, and waxing sticks being used for each client?

The answers to all of these questions should be "yes." If you do not feel comfortable for any reason, go with your instincts and look for another salon that feels more acceptable to you.

Whenever possible, avoid procedures that could break the skin and cause bleeding. For example, instead of cuticle trimmings, opt for using a cuticle remover lotion. Or, try requesting the nail technician push the cuticles back instead of cutting them. All fluids, creams, and powders should be dispensed with shakers, dispenser pumps, spatulas, or sprays to prevent contamination. Also, stick with a dermatologist for removing your corns and calluses. A razor should not be used on calluses at any time.

To further minimize health risks, buy your own manicure or pedicure kit. Have the salon employee use your personal kit which can be purchased inexpensively every time you get a manicure or pedicure. Also, be sure to clean and sanitize your set of instruments after every use.

Fungal nail infections are more likely to occur in those who get manicures or pedicures with tools that have been used on other people. Besides purchasing your own mani-pedi kit, you could also bring your own sandals to cut back on your risk of a fungal infection. Fungal nail infection symptoms include a change in nail shape or increased brittleness or thickness. Though it might be tempting, don’t cover it up with nail polish or artificial nails, as this can trap moisture and worsen the infection. Over-the-counter creams and ointments generally do not help treat nail fungus; you’d need to see a health care provider for prescription antifungal medicines that you take by mouth to clear the infection.

If you experience redness or swelling in any treated areas following a visit to the beauty salon, it would be wise to purchase antibacterial ointment at a drug store and follow the directions for use. If the infection persists or becomes worse, see a health care provider.

Alice!
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