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### Getting Nailed Investigation Uncovers Unsanitary Conditions at Nail Salons



More than 100 women suffered painful infections after pedicures from a California nail salon. (ABCNEWS)

June 8 — This summer, many women will go to the nail salon to be pampered and may get something they don't expect.

#### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

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A 20/20 investigation shows that many salons are unsanitary and in some cases are causing customers severe infections.

Of 27 discount salons tested by [Esoterix Inc.](#), a laboratory that specializes in infection and disease control, 24 had possible disease-causing fungi and bacteria.

#### Watsonville Outbreak

Cherri Brown treated her daughter Amy to a pedicure at Fancy Nails in Watsonville, Calif. Now they both have painful sores on their legs that have been slow to respond to antibiotics.

"I've had these on my legs for four months now," complains Amy. "And they're not gone"

Fancy Nails shut down after investigators found high levels of tuberculosis-related bacteria in all of the salon's footbaths.

Unfortunately for Cherri, Amy and more than 100 other women who went to the salon, however, even when the boils and skin ulcers heal, they often leave deep purple scars. Getting rid of

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them may require skin grafts or laser surgery.

The owner of Fancy Nails admitted to state investigators that he never cleaned the suction screens in the footbaths where debris from hair, skin and nails accumulate — that is where the bacteria is believed to have built up.

### Disturbing Revelations

While there have been no other outbreaks like the one at Fancy Nails, Dr. Shelly Sekula-Rodriguez, an expert in salon-related infections hired by 20/20 to assist in the investigation, says there is potential for such bacterial infections to occur again.

California investigators say they've found similar bacteria at 16 of the 18 salons they checked.

And it is not exclusive to California. 20/20 went with inspectors to manicure stations in Dallas, Phoenix, Boston and Houston. Almost all tested positive for potentially harmful bacteria.

The majority of the salons simply had poor sanitation practices. Nail buffers and emery boards, which are supposed to be thrown away after one use, were being used on customer after customer.

### Poor Communication, Economic Pressure

Part of the problem may be that almost half of all nail technicians nationwide are immigrants for whom English is a second language.

"They may not be able to read the labels on the disinfectant itself because the labels usually are written in English," says Sekula-Rodriguez.

But a more fundamental problem, she says, is the financial pressure facing discount salon owners.

"The competition is very intense to cut prices," she says. "You pay your technicians less, so perhaps they're not as skilled .... You cut back on the quality of you disinfectants, or maybe you don't even use real disinfectants."

Inspectors found many discount salons using heavily diluted disinfectants — in some cases, not sterilizing instruments at all. Tests on one set of clippers found bacteria from human feces.

Many salons were caught using razor-sharp credo blades to scrap calluses from customers' feet. Credo blades are illegal in salons because they are likely to cause bleeding and exposure to harmful bacteria.

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[National-I Council of Boards of Cosmetology Website](#)  
[Calif. Bureau of Barbering and Cosmetology Consumer Information](#)  
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## Identifying Safe Salons

### Licenses:

A salon license should be visibly posted and the technicians' licenses must be posted at the work station with a photo of the owner of the license on it.

### Cleanliness:

The salon and work stations should be clean and free of debris and dirt. Sanitizable implements and files should be washed and disinfected after each use and a new set of unused disposable files should be used on each client.

Foot spas or pedicure baths should be washed and disinfected after each use in accordance with the disinfection requirements for that state.

All products should be kept in manufacturer' labeled containers, along their Material Safety Data (M.S.D.) Sheets which have instructions for safe use and handling.

Disinfecting products must state on the label or hang tag the efficacy telling what organisms the product is effective against.

### How to Complain

If a consumer has been damaged during nail services, they should file a written complaint to the regulatory agency for the state in which the salon is located. Some states have a State Board of Cosmetology and some are regulated by the Health Department.

The address for each state's regulatory agencies can be located either in the phone directory or on the Web site for state government.

In order to be investigated, all complaints must be in writing and must include a name, address and phone number for the person filing the complaint. You can get a list of state boards addresses from the [National Interstate Council of State Boards of Cosmetology](#).



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