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# Acrylic Nail Fact Sheet

## What You Should Know Before You Have Your Nails Done!

*Prepared by Cindy Story*

*Master Nail Technician*

*La Cupola, Hair Salon and Beauty Centre  
Mississauga, On.*

Susan Stein of Foothill Ranch snagged a finger on her soapy hair about a year ago. She expected to find a crack in one of her MMA-based acrylic nails. But as the water cleared the shampoo bubbles away, she noticed that the acrylic nail was lifting off her finger, **taking the natural nail with it.** And the same thing was happening on her other fingers.

Helen Gomez of Mississauga, On. had her nails done for 2 years at what she considered a reputable salon in Brampton. She repeatedly questioned her nail technician as to the condition of her natural nails and was repeatedly assured that they were fine. Three years ago, just a few days before Christmas, Gladys decided not to travel to Brampton and chose to have her nails done in Mississauga. When her new technician (Cindy MacNeil) began to perform the service both the technician and Gladys were horrified. As bits of loose MMA-based acrylic came away so did Gladys' natural nail. **All of her natural nails were the consistency of wet toilet paper.** The MMA was so thick (in spite of the appearance of thin nails) that the service took over 3 hours just to remove the enhancements and two years before healthy nails began to emerge. This is a sad reality of MMA enhancements.... you don't see the damage until it is too late. It can take up to one year for the nail to replace itself and hopefully it is not permanently deformed.

Last year women spent more than \$4 billion on artificial fingernails and business continues to boom. But underneath that veneer is a chaotic scene of unanswered questions, brutal competition and even claims of racism. At issue is a chemical called **Methyl methacrylate, or MMA.** Millions of women who paid for acrylic nail services in recent years may have been unknowingly exposed to the chemical, which has been blamed for fungal infections, nail plate damage, nail loss and deformation, loss of sensation in the fingertips and respiratory ailments and other numerous problems. In 1974 the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared it to be a **Poisonous and deleterious (harmful) substance A when used on fingernails.** Responsible manufacturers quickly and voluntarily switched their salon clients over to Ethyl methacrylate (EMA), a more expensive and safer bonding liquid. Reputable nail salons followed suit. The difference in EMA and MMA is the same as the difference between wood alcohol (methanol) and beverage alcohol (ethanol). Wood alcohol

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when consumed is deadly. Beverage alcohol is considered safe (if not used in excess!).

MMA is safely used to make resins, plastics, and specifically plastic dentures. In the case of the dental industry these processes are done outside of the mouth. Once cured, dental composites are safe when placed in contact with human tissue. The exposure rate is also different. Acrylic nails are filled every 2 - 3 weeks. A dental client may only have a few prostheses throughout their lifetime.

Discount salons may offer a full set of nails for \$25 compared to \$50 or more at their competitors. Some of the differences can be explained by the low overhead of the discount salons, which often operate in cheap storefronts and rely on poorly trained, low wage technicians. But the main reason for this price difference is the use of MMA which can cost as little as \$15 a gallon compared to as much as \$300 for a gallon of EMA.

The problem with MMA is that its atoms are so small that they easily penetrate the skin and nail plate. MMA is a Sensitizer@ that can cause irritation and allergic reactions once it is in contact with the skin. **EMA is much safer, larger in atomic size, and doesn't damage nail plates. It is also hundreds of times less likely to cause allergic reactions.**

While it is the incredible strength of MMA enhancements that attracts some users, it is not appropriate or safe for use on soft nail tissue. MMA-based products have extremely poor adhesion. For enhancements to adhere, the natural nail plate receives severe abrasions (horizontal grooves carved by a large oversized drill bit). The nail plate must be overly filed (drilled) and excessively thin before the methyl methacrylate artificial nail is applied. It is this dangerous strength that increases the potential for nail damage when applied to the weakened nail plate. If the nail breaks the whole nail plate may be removed. Women have had their natural nails ripped out (sometimes permanently) because the MMA acrylic did not break off when exposed to trauma.

Salons using large or oversize brushes in order to save time, make beads of acrylic that are far too wet! The belly of a large brush can carry enough liquid for 4 medium wet beads (or three nails)! This means the product, which may appear to be hardened, does not set up in the correct amount of time and the harmful chemical MMA leeches through the nail plate, into the nail bed and then directly into the blood stream. In short, brushes that are too large don't save time, they can lead to serious allergic reactions.

MMA creates nails which are not easily removed without causing severe damage to the nail plate. It takes only 30 - 35 minutes to remove a set of EMA-based acrylics by soaking in acetone but up to 2 hours to remove MMA-based ones. In order to save time, discount salons often pry or nip the acrylic nail off which pulls off layers of the natural nail and may injure the matrix (which is crucial in the formation of cells for the new nail) leading to permanent deformities of the nail.

**HAZARD SUMMARY from the Materials Data Safety Sheet**

- MMA has a strong, sharp, fruity odour and can affect you when breathed in.
- It may damage the developing fetus.
- Exposure can irritate the eyes, skin, nose, and throat.
- MMA can cause a skin allergy.
- Exposure could damage the nervous system. Symptoms may include Apins and needles@, numbness, weakness, and changes in the ability to remember and concentrate.
- Severe side effects may include abnormal liver or kidney function, nervous system damage and reproductive problems.

**Have You Been Exposed to MMA?****Heres how to tell:**

- Low pricing for acrylic service (not a special sale or offer).
- Acrylic difficult or impossible to remove with acetone or other solvents.
- Technicians or management secretive about acrylic product brands used. Just because they have a Name brand polish in the salon does not mean they are using that brand of acrylic. Ask to see original containers.
- Technicians often wear masks to prevent inhalation of the powerful distinct odour - Noxious, sharp and fruity.

**Based on available information, I believe knowingly using MMA is irresponsibly**

endangering the client's health. It is inexpensive to buy and its use is obviously driven by greed and not professional concern for clients.

When in doubt, pick a knowledgeable, reputable technician and choose UV Gel Nails, Silkwraps, Fibreglass or a Natural Nail Manicure. Ask many questions and if the tech cannot answer them to your satisfaction choose another salon. It's your health that is at stake.



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