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Hygiene center of safe salons

By Becky Hathcock

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Nail technician Tracey Cefalu (left) gives customer Rachel McNelis a manicure Friday at Cabella Salon and Day Spa on County Line Road in Jackson. Salon experts say that your manicurist's knowledge and practice of good hygiene and sanitation are key to keeping you from getting an infection along with your pretty new nails.

Stacey Jolley maintained an expensive set of acrylic nails for years.

Unable to get an appointment with her regular nail tech, Jolley took a chance and booked a session with a new nail technician, one she did not know very well.

While the cost was less than what she had been paying, the less expensive manicure ended up costing her dearly, she says.

"I have had my nails done every two weeks for years and never had any trouble. Then I went to a new person who (apparently) wasn't sanitizing their equipment and ended up with a nail infection," she says of months of excruciating pain and trouble getting her nails back to good health.

While many women may feel more attractive with long beautiful nails and smooth feet following a manicure or pedicure, a desire for pretty fingers and toes does not have to be at the expense of good hygiene, Tracey Cefalu, a nail technician with Cabella Day Spa where she says the staff stresses customer safety.

"Customers should be looking and seeing if technicians are sanitizing their implements between customers and if you are not sure, ask," Cefalu recommends.

"If you are getting a pedicure in one of the foot spas, they should be cleaning it between each customer," she adds.

Jolley says she just assumed her new technician sanitized because her old one did.

When her nail initially began to show signs of infection, she didn't think it "was that big a deal," she said.



Joe Ellis/The Clarion-ledger

Nail technician Tracey Cefalu applies a first coat of paint to Rachel McNelis' nails Friday at Cabella Salon and Day Spa.

But after a short time, all her fingers became infected with a nail fungus requiring months of treatment.

"What is regularly the nail free edge, the white part, began growing in the middle of my nail," Jolley said.

"It became painful and kept getting worse and spreading to my other nails," she says of the splitting nail beds that could be lifted up and separated from her fingers. "My nails wouldn't grow and it was like it was eating my nails."

She finally wound up at her doctor who prescribed an antibiotic and a medicine to apply directly to her nails to help them recover from the fungus that had embedded itself under her nails.

"It was hard, because I've always had really healthy nails and taken good care of them," said Jolley, who never reported the incident to the salon.

Good nail hygiene, even at home, needs to follow the rules of sanitation, Cefalu said.

Stainless steel implements such as nail and cuticle scissors can be disinfected with alcohol at home. At the salon, hospital grade disinfectants and sanitizers are used on all tools and equipment, she adds.

"We sanitize the customers and ourselves before we start a manicure," Cefalu says of a spray sanitizer she uses to avoid the spreading of bacteria.

But a lot of what keeps a nail salon clean you will never see, says Cabella owner Rick Raulston who insists on strict cleaning practices and top-of-the-line sanitizers and disinfectants.

"It costs more," Raulston says of Cabella's practice of running extra cleansers through the foot spas before and after each customer and some people may become upset about higher costs of a manicure, but it is for their own protection, he adds.

Jolley agrees, "Trying to save money can end up hurting you."

"With this infection, it hurt to wash my hair and even put on clothes," she says.

Nail salons are regulated by the Mississippi State Board of Cosmetology and the state has strict regulations that are to be followed by each salon, says Wanda Beauchamp, an instructor with the Mississippi Institute of Aesthetics in Clinton.

The Board of Cosmetology investigates complaints against salons accused of violating sanitation requirements. Those found in violation who fail to correct problems can have their licenses suspended or revoked. They also can face a fine of up to \$400, depending the number of previous violations.

Beauchamp, who has trained cosmetologists for 50 years, says students are required to complete 350 clock hours in nail care training to become certified nail technicians.

The classes include the study of nail disorders, diseases, skin disorders and its diseases and how to prevent the spread of infection, Beauchamp says.

Manicure and pedicure product safety falls under OSHA guidelines and there are material and safety data sheets for every product used in a salon, Beauchamp adds.

"They have to learn how to properly store and dispose of the materials as well," Beauchamp says.

The most common nail fungus Beauchamp says she sees is green caused by mold or the one like Jolley's when moisture has leaked in under an acrylic nail leaving a dry powdery substance on the nails.

There are ways to avoid the spread of fungus, Beauchamp says.

Knowing your nail technician and their sanitation procedures is as simple as asking, she says.

Or clients can purchase and bring their own tools. Many salons will allow you to purchase a manicure set for your own personal use, she adds.

"And if you are going to get a pedicure, it is advisable not to shave or wax before because the pores are open and scrubs may irritate the skin," she advises.

Melba Luckett, executive director of the Mississippi State Board of Cosmetology, said all salons are inspected regularly, at least one to two times a year, and that of the 2,508 licensed manicurists in the state, there has only been one formal complaint filed in the past year.

Even though there are plenty of safety guidelines and regulations, consumer education is the key to keeping a healthy nail, say both Beauchamp and Cefalu.

"We try to educate the students to educate the clients to keep regular enhancement appointments," Beauchamp said.

"Usually if you are having to wait a few minutes, look to see if tools are changed from one client to the next," she recommends.

Beauchamp says: "If a nail technician is doing what she is supposed to be doing, she is supposed to clean each stainless steel implement with soap and water between each use and put in wet sanitizer for 10-20 minutes, then retrieve with tongs and put in a dry sanitizing area," she explains.

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