

Proper salon
disinfection practices
are even more
important in today's
spa setting.

clean sweep

By Janet McCormick



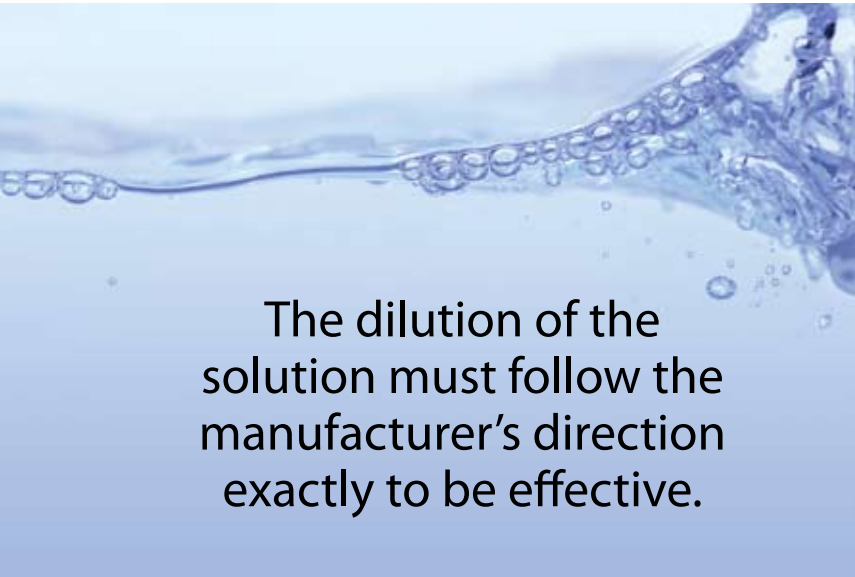
THE SPA INDUSTRY IS CHANGING DRAMATICALLY AND QUICKLY:

The products are more effective, the equipment is more complex and providers' skills are moving to higher levels. Thanks to these advances, and to some very public lapses, basic safety requirements are also on the rise, requiring a higher level of information and commitment by you and your staff.

Outside observers would certainly say that estheticians are health-oriented and caring people, and this is, to a certain extent, true. In saying this, one might also think that these professionals would be committed to excellent sanitation and disinfection practices, but sometimes a crunched schedule or a lowered emphasis on sanitation among new estheticians may make this questionable. Linda Orsuto, spa director of 800 West Salon & Spa

(www.800west.com) in Marlton, New Jersey, says that her first few months as spa director made her feel like "the sanitation police," a role she'd hoped she wouldn't have had to fill. "New estheticians should be taught to be fully aware of their responsibility for the safety of their clients," she says, "and that includes safety from the transmission of disease. They should be working 24/7 with good conscience that they're fully protecting their clients. Compromising the safety of the client is not worth the risk, no matter how rushed you are."

With this in mind, it's important to review sanitation and safety procedures with your staff, regardless of how long they've been active in the profession. Basic safety is paramount to a successful spa.



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Basic Review

Proper disinfection kills pathogenic (disease-causing) bacteria on nonporous surfaces. Implement disinfection in the spa industry is most often performed by complete immersion in a hospital-grade disinfectant that's effective against the organisms that cause HIV-1/HBV and tuberculosis. "Today's spa professional must be aware of specific requirements to properly disinfect implements and surfaces," says Gerri Cevetillo, general manager of Ultrionics (www.ultrionicsusa.com), Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. It's important to go over these basic procedures with your staff to achieve the right level of disinfection needed to keep clients safe:

Read the instructions on the label. The dilution of the solution must follow the manufacturer's directions exactly to be effective; too much water in the mix will nullify the solution's effectiveness. Correct timing is also important. Keep implements submerged for at least the required time.

Clean implements first. Placing contaminated implements directly into the solution will render the disinfection process ineffective. Brushing implements prior to submersion removes the oils that can hold bacteria and organisms that cling to the surfaces of implements. Use a brush for cleaning; swishing implements in soapy water isn't adequate. Placing wet implements in the solution will also dilute it, so it's essential to pat implements dry prior to submersion.

Change the solution daily (or according to the

manufacturer's instructions). This is the only way to guarantee that the solution will remain at the proper strength to disinfect. Particles that appear at the bottom of the container after 24 hours are a signal that the solution may not be performing properly.

Maintain proper storage. Store dry, disinfected implements in a clean, covered container. If you're lining the container with a paper or cloth towel, change the liner daily.

Disinfect surfaces. Countertops, equipment and tables should be sprayed with a disinfectant between clients to prevent cross contamination.

Thankfully, Cevetillo reports that the sale of disinfection/sanitation products is on the rise. "Education prevails, and today's estheticians are proactive in assuring their clients

that they're providing optimum protection during services," she says.

Beyond Basic

Sterilization, the killing of all living microorganisms, was a standard that formerly wasn't considered important to the practice of esthetics. But this level of prevention is becoming the norm as states look at protective safety measures for spa clients.

Autoclaves, devices that apply steam at a high temperature under pressure to implements, is gaining more examination from state regulators and spa owners alike. "It takes a temperature of above 121



Some states, like Texas, are looking into autoclaves as a means of sterilizing esthetic and nail implements.

degrees Celsius (about 250 degrees Fahrenheit) to kill bacterial spores, and it's necessary to heat the materials under pressure, so an autoclave should be the modality for the sterilization in spas," says David R. Caprette, Ph.D., of the Department of Biochemistry & Cell Biology at Rice University, Houston.

"Our company is incorporating the use of autoclaves in our spas as we move forward, as we believe this is the right thing to do," says Sherry Taylor, director of OSHA compliance at Klinger Advanced Aesthetics (www.klinger.com) in Norwalk, Connecticut, of the company's 12 spas across the country. "Also, we believe this is a level of prevention that states will soon require." Indeed, Texas passed a regulation this March, after the death of a client as a result of carelessness during a pedicure, requiring cosmetology facilities to sterilize all implements that come into contact with the skin, specifically mentioning manicures and pedicures.

Spas in Texas (and elsewhere) do have an option to the autoclave: disposables, including throwaway spatulas (tongue depressors) for use in waxing and product dispensing, gauze and even tiny paper cups for holding dispensed products. Machine-based services can benefit from the use of disposables—many microdermabrasion machine models have disposable handpiece tips, for example. The advantages of single-use implements can be greater than simple sanitation, however. Their use during a service can save disinfection and storage time, and alleviate concern about how well your staff is practicing disease prevention techniques behind closed doors.

The Personal Touch

The use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves, masks and goggles, in the skincare setting is a somewhat contentious topic that has received much attention lately. There's no doubt that PPE use can effectively protect estheticians and nail technicians from exposure to pathogens and flying particles that may reach the therapists' skin, mucous membranes or personal clothing. "Estheticians, along with all other service providers, must be committed to keeping their workplace environment safe and free from contamination at all times so that we may protect our clients, coworkers and ourselves from harm," says



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Taylor. "This means strict adherence to Universal Precautions [published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in August 1987, which defined PPEs and their use] before, during and immediately following each and every service performed, without exception."

Not all beauty professionals are aware of PPE's use, however. In 2001, a study from the Ohio State University showed that few cosmetology professionals knew much about OSHA (40.7%) and even fewer knew what personal protective equipment was (20.7%). When asked if they would use it, less than 10% answered yes.

In addition, many practitioners maintain that direct touch is vital to esthetic services. "The power of human touch cannot be overestimated," says Jane Wurwand, founder of Dermalogica (www.dermalogica.com), Carson, California. "Premature babies fail to thrive without it, wound healing can be accelerated with it and the physical act of human skin-on-skin touching can 'feed' a hungry psyche. When there's any likelihood of contact with blood, as in during extractions or even waxing, then we teach that gloves must be worn for protection. However, when a skin therapist gives



Each employee
bears responsibility
for implementing
preventive
practices.

a massage, it's imperative, in my opinion, that skin makes contact with skin.”

OSHA, a federal agency created to protect employees, is clear on the matter of wearing PPEs, although many state boards are still wrestling with wording and intra-agency standards. OSHA generally won't inspect a salon unless certain conditions exist, such as an accident, death, reported illness or employee complaint, but they will look for PPEs if they do inspect. Any incident of failing to comply with OSHA regulations can result in a fine of up to \$7,000.

The secret to successfully wearing gloves is correct fit. Choose a glove size that's slightly smaller than the hands to prevent the squeaking or loose glove fingers and palms interfering with the activities of the hands. The feeling of perspiration inside gloves is very unpleasant, but glove liners are available by the dozen from supply houses and can be washed in a lingerie bag for reuse.

Estheticians resist wearing masks for several reasons. Many complain that their glasses fog up during wear, a situation caused by poor placement of the nose clasp on the mask. Others complain that breathing is difficult with

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them on. But masks prevent extraction materials from flying into the esthetician's mouth or onto the lips, and prevent airborne transmission of microbes during resurfac-

ing. Discomforts can be overcome through proper fit, so try masks from several different manufacturers with your staff.

Many estheticians also resist

wearing goggles, which prevent particles and microbes from entering the eyes, mainly because they're not cute. Shop around at the industry trade shows, however, and you're likely to find a style that will suit your tastes and please your staff.

Safely "Spa"

The good news is, proper disinfection, sterilization and protection techniques don't have to interfere with the tranquil spa environment you've worked so hard to promote. "If prevention practices are integrated into the normal processes of providing service, they won't be time-consuming procedures that interfere with good service and tranquility," says Orsuto. Observant clients are usually comforted by the knowledge that your spa cares about their safety, so many spas place a statement in their service menu concerning their prevention practices and commitment to proper sanitation.

Since estheticians and nail technicians work mostly in individual rooms or at individual stations, each of your employees bears responsibility for implementing preventive practices. Today's esthetician is savvy, as is today's client. It behooves us to protect our clients and ourselves by adhering to effective disinfecting procedures. This is certain to provide a more relaxed spa experience for everyone! ●

Janet McCormick is a former salon owner and spa director, well-known educator and author of *Applied Asepsis: A Guide for Upgrading/Designing a Salon Disease Control System*. She holds a Master of Science degree in Allied Health Management and a CIDESCO diploma. Owner of Spa Techniques Consulting, she can be reached at janmccormk@aol.com.