

# How Safe Is Your Salon And Spa?

By Caspar Verre MBA, CA



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**A**s beauty professionals we learned long ago that we would be held accountable for Infection Control despite a lack of clearly defined standards for infection control. Standards like what to use, when and how. How ridiculous is that?

As a member of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, a "profession", it is unbelievable to me that beauty professionals want to be seen as belonging to a true profession, yet there are no standards, the cornerstone of any profession. Standards are important rules and/or guide lines which provide clear benchmarks to measure professional conduct by. They ensure consistency of conduct across a profession, and standards bring credibility to a profession. Standards are the hallmark of a profession.

So when it comes to infection control, there are no standards. Yet beauty professionals continue to allow themselves to be held accountable and responsible for following appropriate infection control procedures but no "body", association or even government agency has specified what constitutes "appropriate". We may as well be operating in the dark.

Well ladies and gentlemen, the time has come when the beauty professional can no longer wait for such standards to be developed for them. Today's beauty professional must weigh the increased risks in liability arising from infection control or in many cases, the lack of infection control, with the cost of implementing their own standards for infection control in order to protect themselves against such risks.

As professionals without standards it is imperative that we develop and maintain the highest levels of infection control standards and procedures for our salon and spas. It is as imperative that we conduct public health and safety in our salon environments as it is to let our clients, employees and the public at large know what steps we have taken to protect them. To not do so in today's environment is to sentence your salon to death.

Indeed in today's environment, with new and powerful viruses and bacteria popping up at an alarming rate; with a paranoid consumer; and with Health Canada conducting surprise health and safety audits of salon and spa environments, it is only a matter of time before salons fail either because Health Canada shuts them down due to health and safety infractions or even worse, salons fail all on their own because an educated and extremely aware consumer avoids them like the plague.

Infection Control is both a real and a public perception problem for salons and spas today. Salons must in fact adopt and maintain the highest standards for dealing with infection control and they must be seen as doing so.

The first step requires the salon to use only sterilization, disinfecting and sanitizing solutions approved by Health Canada. This step ensures that the "what to use" question is addressed and meets all Health Canada requirements for infection control. Having established the credibility, or at least the appearance that the salon is using solutions and methods backed of Health Canada, the next steps are to actually understand which spores, viruses and bacteria can be transmitted in the salon environment, how they can be transmitted, and finally, which infection control solutions to use and how to use them given the level of infection risk.

To the question of which infectious agents can be transmitted in a salon environment, every salon should keep a list of known infectious agents. The lists should be updated where new infectious agents become known and salons should ensure that they have the proper solutions and procedures in place to address the risk of transmission. Some of the most popular agents include: Bacteria-Staphylococcus Aureus, Streptococcus, Impetigo and Pseudomonas aeruginosa; Viruses- Norwalk, Influenza, Hep B and C, HIV, and HPV warts; Fungi-Tinea pedis, Tinea and Candida; and many other potential parasites such as Scabies, Lice, etc...Every salon should make the most



exhaustive list they can possibly make and then should determine how each is being addressed or needs to be addressed.

To the question of how these potential infectious agents can be transmitted in the salon environment, there are primarily three: direct exposure (surfaces), direct contact (skin to skin) and vehicle born (contaminated equipment, implements, linen, etc..) A fourth source of infection transmission exists, albeit rare, but with recent infections like SARS, it should be added to the list and that would include the possibility of air born infections.

Finally, to the question of how to address each of the potential sources of infections, Dr. Wendy Smeltzer, at the most recent Spa Canada Conference, spoke about this subject and indicated that one way for salons and spas to determine what level of infection control they may require is to use Spaulding classification of services as a starting point.

Spaulding classifies services as critical, semi-critical and non-critical.

**These are defined as follows:**

**Critical** surfaces include items which penetrate the skin or mucous membranes (ie. needles, surgical instruments). The most appropriate method of infection control for this type of source is sterilization.

**Semi-critical** include items which do not penetrate but which come into contact with the skin or mucous membranes (ie. nippers, comedone extractors). The most appropriate method of infection control for this type of source is intermediate to high levels of disinfection, although sterilization could be used and would provide even greater infection control.

**Non-critical** includes items which may come into contact with but never penetrate the skin or mucous membranes. Here low levels of disinfection would be sufficient.

In regards to what constitutes low, intermediate and high levels of disinfection, and sterilization, the following information may be helpful:

Low Level Disinfectants-used primarily on surfaces to kill some bacteria, viruses and fungi. These include products such as Quats (Ultracare, Barbicide, Zephiran, Falrol Plus) and Phenols ( Dettol, Lysol) and Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide( ACCEL AHP). Be aware of false label claims.

Intermediate Level Disinfectants-these will kill most mycobacteria(such as tuberculosis) most bacteria(such as pseudomonas, salmonella), viruses and fungi but are not effective against spores. These include products such as Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide (ACCEL AHP)Alcohols (Ethanol 70%, Isopropanol) and Halogens (Bleach)

High Level Disinfectants-these will kill virtually all mycobacteria, vegetative bacteria, viruses and fungi except for spores. These include products such as 2% Glutaraldehyde, 7% Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide(ACCEL AHP)

Sterilization-will destroy all forms of microbials. Equipment and products include Autoclave (steam under pressure), Dry Heat, Liquid and chemical sterilants such as Virox's 7%Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide Chemosterilant(ACCEL) (6hrs is the minimum allowed by Health Canada for cold soak chemosterilant solutions) and Chemi-claves (chemical vapour). Please note that Glass Bead and UV methods and boiling water are NOT sterilization.

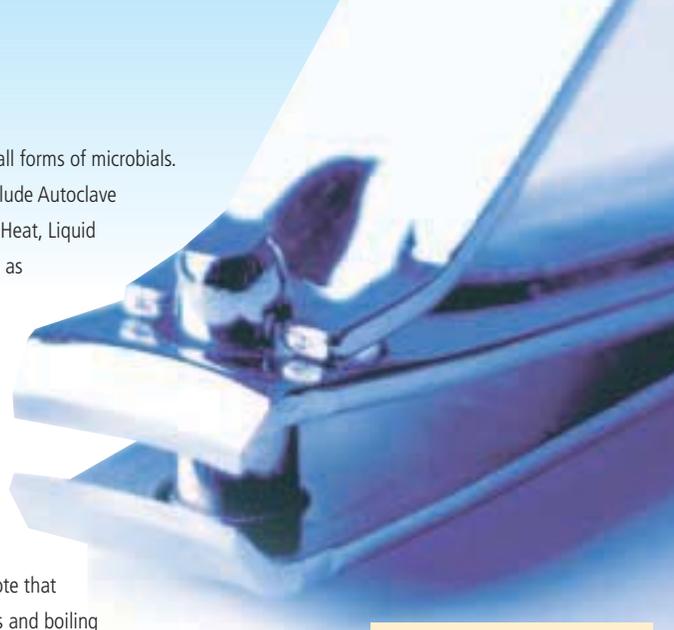
In addition to establishing specific procedures for infection control, there are also a number of general common sense procedures that should always be followed. Things such as hand washing regularly with alcohol based products, wearing latex or vinyl gloves, keeping sinks well stocked with anti-bacterial soaps and single service towels, well ventilated premises, smooth and non-porous surfaces, all equipment should be kept clean and in good repair and de-contaminated after every use, all contaminated waste should be placed in tightly sealed plastic bags and immediately disposed of, and any other common sense measure you can think of.

You should also keep in mind that cleaning is paramount prior to disinfection. It would make sense to choose a disinfectant that is a proven excellent cleaner as well as having proven efficacy as an excellent germicide.

Finally, having all these products and procedures in place means very little if salon staff do not comply. Therefore, in order to ensure staff compliance it is recommended that you document what you know about infection control including all policies and procedures, educate staff on what you know and on the related policies and procedures and, lead by example by following your own policies and procedures.

Do all of these little things and you may proclaim your salon and spa to be as safe as can be. Remember, successful infection control requires choosing the correct products (beware of false manufacturer claims) for the required level of infection control, using the correct protocols (policies and procedures or standards) and complying with them.

If you would like to know more about Health Canada approved Infection Control products and procedures that can be used to reduce the risks of transmission, please call 1-800-465-8170 or 416-739-9000 and ask for a copy of Virox Technologies Inc. Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide product brochures.



## Potential Dangers in the Spa and Salon Environment

### Bacteria

Staphylococcus Aureus, Streptococcus, Impetigo and Pseudomonas aeruginosa;

### Viruses

Norwalk, Influenza, Hep B and C, HIV, and HPV warts; Fungi- Tinea pedis, Tinea and Candida; and many other potential parasites such as Scabies, Lice, etc...