

# Safety First

*Think you're liable to only state inspectors? Think again.*

By Nancy King

**H**ow do you feel when a state inspector shows up unexpectedly at your salon to scrutinize your salon's sanitary condition? Scared? Nervous? Not sure if you followed the guidelines perfectly? Will you be fined? What about the rest of the salon staff? Are *they* following correct procedures? Such thoughts fill your head when an inspector comes knocking, and you don't seem to exhale until she has left the building. But what you don't realize is that two *more important* types of inspectors frequent your salon every day: the client and you. First, every salon client looks for a safe salon experience. Second, you should be inspecting your salon during work hours to ensure compliance with state rules. You should survey the situation and make certain that clients see what you want them to see—a salon environment that assures their safety. This method is called self-inspection; review the checklist posted online at [www.nailpro.com](http://www.nailpro.com). You can also download the checklist and use it to monitor your salon's sanitary condition.



## Sanitization vs. Disinfection

The first distinction you need to know: the difference between sanitization and disinfection. Sanitizing is simply cleaning to remove all *visible* residue. Cleaning an item doesn't kill germs; it simply removes dirt and debris from the item and reduces the risk of spreading infections from client to client. Disinfection involves using chemicals to destroy pathogens on nonliving surfaces. However, before you can disinfect an item, you must sanitize it. You can clean salon tools with several safe methods: scrubbing with soap and water, using an ultrasonic unit and using solvents. After you scrub and disinfect the implement, is it clean? If you can see residue on the item, it isn't clean.

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Some salon items, such as table surfaces, require that you clean them, but you don't need to disinfect them. When did you last witness a restaurant worker or hospital employee spraying disinfectant on a table, and then waiting an additional 10 minutes for the product to work? Never! Disinfecting tabletops isn't necessary; tables and furniture should be clean, but such items don't pose infection risks. However, remember that cleaning correctly is just as important as disinfecting.

Once you thoroughly clean an item, it must dry before being placed into a disinfecting solution. If an item has water on it, the water could dilute the disinfectant and make it less effective.

### Disinfection Simplified

Once you clean your tools and equipment, you must disinfect them. Disinfection kills

most germs, but only when you use the disinfection product correctly. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for diluting the product, and remember that each disinfectant is different, so no universal disinfectant instructions exist. Make sure to wear gloves and goggles when mixing, and never use your bare fingers to remove implements from the disinfectant. Remember, disinfectant solutions are pesticides and contain poisonous elements.

Read the disinfectant's label to see if the product is appropriate to use according to your state's rules. Most states require the use of an EPA-registered hospital-grade disinfectant, which kills bacteria, fungi and viruses. An EPA-registered tuberculocidal disinfectant will kill those as well, and also prevents the spread of tuberculosis; however, only a few states require a tuberculocidal disinfectant. Many states have ruled against salons using tuberculocidal disinfectants because the chemicals in these products are dangerous if used incorrectly.

How often should disinfectants be changed? Every single day! As always, follow manufacturer instructions. Once mixed, EPA-registered disinfectants are effective for up to 24 hours. Disinfectants require 10-minute contact with an item in order to kill germs. One critical—but often overlooked—practice to keep in mind when using disinfectants: Immerse completely. All EPA-registered disinfectant labels clearly state that the user needs to preclean items, then disinfect them by completely immersing the items in the correctly diluted solution. This means that the solution must cover *all* surfaces of the item being disinfected—even the handles of nippers and the insides of pedicure equipment!



## Implements: Disinfect or Dispose?

Nail techs employ two types of implements in their services: multiuse and single-use. If the act of cleaning and disinfecting damages the item or changes its condition, the item is considered a single-use item. Such items include cotton swabs, orangewood sticks and emery boards. Items made of hard materials,

such as glass, metal, fiberglass or hard plastic, are considered multiuse items. These instruments can be cleaned, disinfected and safely used again. When shopping for salon supplies, consider the cost of replacing an item vs. the time and cost to disinfect it. For example, orangewood sticks and some nail files must be disposed of after each use. Manufacturers price these items cheaply,

because they are single-use items.

What if an implement comes into contact with a cut? You should toss porous items and disinfect nonporous items. Is saving a contaminated buffer worth the risk? No! Toss out the buffer and replace it with a clean one.

## Never Sacrifice Safety for Time!

No matter what you charge for services or how much time you take to complete them, you cannot afford to be so busy that you don't clean and disinfect correctly. Some salons try to squeeze by with unsanitary work conditions, but this never really works for them. They may initially save money and/or time, but the cost of client lawsuits or the loss of future business is never worth the risk.

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client that you'll be with her  
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tools first.

If you run a little late on an appointment, you might think that you don't need to take the time to clean and disinfect your tools. Don't make this mistake! Tell your next client that you'll be with her in a few minutes because you need to clean and disinfect your tools first. Not only does your license depend on this, but your client will appreciate your penchant for being safe, and she'll let her friends know that you're a "safety first" tech too!

However, if time really is an issue for you, don't despair. Have a backup strategy that will save you time, yet still keep your services clean. You can stay on time by having more than one set of clean implements and files on hand. At the end of the day, clean and disinfect all of them at the same time. If you choose this routine, remember to store dirty tools in a correctly labeled, closed container so that you don't use these tools again until you properly clean and disinfect them. You can also

use one set of tools throughout the day, cleaning and disinfecting after each client, but be sure to incorporate the time needed to correctly perform the procedures into your schedule. This way, you stay on time, but more importantly, the clients see that you protect their safety; they never have to wonder if a tool is clean, because they see you performing the procedure.

## What About Pedicure Equipment?

Proper cleaning and disinfecting of pedicure equipment remains an extremely important part of a nail professional's daily duties. Often, nail techs think that they disinfect their pedicure spas properly, but many times they don't. Do your homework to understand the extra effort you need to make during

the cleaning process. Surface cleaning isn't enough, and knowing the correct disinfection procedures and understanding which products to use are extremely important. Techs should take a class on proper disinfection techniques to polish their own practices.

So if surface cleaning isn't enough, then what do you need to do to be safe? All state rules require that all pedicure tools and equipment be cleaned and disinfected with an EPA-registered disinfectant before every client. "All" is a big word. It means that the same sanitation and disinfection steps you use for metal tools must also be done with all pedicure equipment, including basins, bowls and sinks. After every pedicure, the basin should be cleaned of all visible residue. Fill the basin with water and the correct amount of disinfectant (check labels for diluting instructions) and leave the disinfectant sitting in the basin for 10 minutes. If you are disinfecting a whirlpool unit (with or without pipes), turn on the machine and let the disinfectant solution circulate for 10 minutes after every pedicure. If you don't take this step, you could be making a very expensive mistake.

If you are considering using additives or tablets that promise the power of a disinfectant, take note: No powder, tablet or liquid can be put into the water in lieu of manually cleaning and disinfecting the basin correctly according to state rules. It isn't as simple as dropping a tablet into the basin and watching it fizz between—or during—pedicures. You need to drain the water, mix the disinfectant, fill the basin with disinfectant, let it circulate, flush the system (if it's a whirlpool), and then drain and wipe down the equipment every single time you use the pedicure throne.

No matter how you clean and disinfect, always take the time to follow your state board requirements to protect the health of your clients. To obtain a self-inspection form, go to [www.nailpro.com](http://www.nailpro.com) or call 800/442-5667. ↓

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*Nancy King is the director of education for Nailpro. As a recognized authority on safe salon practices and disinfection, she has been retained in many lawsuits relating to infections and has been featured on ABC's 20/20 and CNN's Paula Zahn Now to talk about pedicure safety.*