

WHEN THE LAZY DAYS OF SUMMER arrive, a laid back attitude tends to come along for the ride. People are more care-free than usual during the summer months.

They walk around barefoot, sit in sweaty lounge chairs and use each other's towels at the beach—unknowingly transferring bacteria and disease.

The sticky heat and humidity of summer create a perfect breeding ground for parasites, bacteria, fungi and viruses. Foreign invaders can wreak havoc in the spa without our knowledge. All services are risky, particularly waxing, manicures, pedicures, body treatments and facials.

These perpetrators do not discriminate. They find homes in blood, skin and dark, moist areas such as underarms, groin and inside of the nose. That may result in everything from minor skin irritations to more serious illnesses or infection.

Not only are our clients at risk, but we as providers can be affected as well. We may have paper cuts, torn cuticles, scratches and microscopic fissures invisible to the naked eye, which can serve as direct pathways for the spread of disease.

When we place safety at the bottom of our priority list, we compromise our health, as well as the safety of our co-workers and clients.

SCENARIO 1

In the heat of the summer, a new client arrives for a bikini wax. You have read articles on the importance of wearing gloves and the danger of double dipping. You follow appropriate guidelines when necessary. In this case, you do a visual check of the area to be waxed. The skin looks fine, so you proceed with your favorite reusable metal applicator and no gloves. You have now created the perfect opportunity for infection to spread in your spa.

The above example is just one of those decisions that may seem inconsequential at the time it is made, much like choosing to send a text while driving. However if we continue to take our eyes off the road—even for a second—something devastating could happen that ultimately jeopardizes both our safety and the safety of others. That is true when a poor decision is made behind the wheel and while performing a treatment at the spa.

SCENARIO 2

Your spa is located in a beach town where swimsuits and bare feet are the norm—and your establishment is no exception. A client arrives without an appointment, and you ask her to wait 10 minutes. During the waiting period, she strolls barefoot into your retail boutique, hair salon and ladies

room. As you begin her pedicure, you notice the beginning of athlete's foot. You choose to ignore it and continue with the service. Now not only has your pedicure station been contaminated—so has everywhere else.

We have an obligation to advise our clients appropriately when we notice a possibly contagious condition. Offer a substitute service and refer the client to a physician for treatment.

SCENARIO 3

It has been a great day, packed with appointments and healthy retail sales, but now you are looking forward to the summer evening ahead. If you do not leave now you will definitely hit traffic. So you decide to disinfect your brushes in the morning. When the morning comes, however, you forget that the brushes on your counter have not been cleaned. You start to prepare as usual for your first client, creating another perfect opportunity for infections to spread.

When we visit a restaurant, we usually base our opinion on the look and feel of the establishment. We would never consciously choose to dine in a dirty place. But do we ever really know what is going on in the kitchen? Is the food prepared with our health and safety in mind? Those brushes left on the counter are no more safe than the carelessly prepared food in the back of the restaurant!

SCENARIO 4

In order to save money, you decide to change your disinfectant less frequently and use disposable items more than once. After all, how dirty can they possibly get? Once again, you have created a perfect breeding ground for disease.

Dirty disinfectant is ineffective. Replace it with fresh solution whenever floating debris or cloudiness is apparent. Follow manufacturers' guidelines and check with your state board. Some states have updated, or are in the process of updating, regulations to include sterilization by autoclave of reusable implements, along with the enforcement of using disposables one time only. The purchase of an autoclave is a very wise investment, regardless of whether or not it is required by law.

Consciously or unconsciously, we put our own lives and the lives of others at risk on a daily basis. Every time we get in our cars, eat in a restaurant or visit a spa we are placing our safety in someone else's hands.

Documented cases of dreadful infections have been traced back to unsanitary conditions in salons and spas throughout the country, namely methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA. Experts say that even healthy people may be carriers. ➔

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Beware of **summer** invaders

guarding spa safety



When we choose to treat everyone as potentially contagious (as stated by OSHA), we need not worry. Washing hands, wearing gloves, onetime use of disposables and following appropriate disinfection and sterilization guidelines are the golden rules in preventing the spread of infectious disease.

Nothing may ever happen, but if it does, the business we work so hard to build could be in jeopardy. When safety and health issues are compromised and something serious does happen, the results can be devastating. Diseases can spread, hefty fines levied, licenses revoked and businesses lost. *Everyone* in the chain of command may be held accountable, including spa directors, managers and business owners.

Although we have a legal, ethical and moral obligation to uphold the laws and regulations that govern our industry, we should always strive to go above and beyond what is expected. This summer, give your clients the gift of knowing they can relax and enjoy their experiences in a clean, safe and healthy environment.

Summer checklist

- Purchase an autoclave to sterilize reusable implements such as comedone extractors, tweezers, etc. It is well worth the cost. (Check with your state board to see if an autoclave is mandatory.)
- Follow appropriate disinfection procedures:
 1. Wash brushes with soap and water.
 2. Rinse and dry with paper towels.
 3. Fully immerse in clean, fresh disinfectant.
 4. Use an EPA registered, hospital grade disinfectant.
 5. Rinse implements.
 6. Thoroughly dry and store in a clean, covered container away from pens, phones or other potentially contaminated items.
- Disposable tools are to be used only once before being thrown away or given to the client. That includes nail files, buffers and sponges.
- Keep wax clean by covering wax pot when not in use and never, ever double dip—regardless of what you may read or hear.
- Wear gloves when giving services, cleaning up and handling dirty linens.

- Utilize face masks and eye protection when applicable.
- Allow clients to see you wash your hands and prepare clean implements.
- Display hand sanitizer where the client can see it.
- Have clients wash their hands prior to manicures.
- Require that appropriate clothing and shoes be worn by both clients and staff.
- Keep clean towels in a closed cabinet or container.
- Follow strict controls for washing laundry on-site. If an outside laundry service is used, make sure it is an OSHA-approved facility.
- Have clients wear disposable slippers to prevent the spread of athlete's foot, warts, etc.
- Keep trash cans covered and empty them often to avoid overflow.
- We all love our pets, but a spa is not the place for them. The only exception should be pets belonging to disabled clients.
- Check individual state regulations and visit www.osha.gov for further information.

Advertise your commitment to safety

- Create and display a mission statement reflecting your dedication to safety.
- Openly discuss the measures you take and encourage others in your salon or spa to do the same.
- Advertise safety on your website, newspaper and radio station.
- Hold an open house and invite the local media to attend.
- Offer prospective clients a tour of your facility, and point out the specific safety measures you take that set you apart from others.
- Add your mission statement to your menu of services.
- Encourage questions from your clients—and make sure you know the answers!
- Take the opportunity to advertise your commitment to your clients' well being in e-mail blasts, postcards and newsletters.

By being aware of and taking action against these summer invaders, you are effectively ensuring the safety of your clients and employees. ■

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