

Guidelines for Controlling and Minimizing Skin Exposure to Nail Products

INTA/NMC Consumer Guidelines

These guidelines outline steps that nail professionals can use to minimize exposure to potentially irritating substances and avoid allergic reactions. It is important for salon professionals to utilize techniques that ensure the nail services they perform are done in the safest manner possible. Fortunately, when the proper steps are taken it is easy to safely perform professional nail services, while keeping skin healthy. Minimizing skin exposure is an important way to ensure that nail salon products are properly and safely handled.

What is Product Overexposure?

When redness or other signs of skin irritation develop, it may be a result of overexposing the skin to certain ingredients found in some professional nail care products. Overexposure is often caused by prolonged (lingering) and/or repeated skin contact to such ingredients. Typically nail salon products are used in small amounts and often are designed for application to the nail plate only, making it much easier to avoid skin overexposure. Also, healthy nail plates are made of dense keratin and therefore not very likely to absorb these ingredients, making it much easier to avoid skin overexposure. Conscientious nail professionals should understand and follow the recommendations in this brochure to help avoid overexposing their skin and the skin of their clients.

Some examples of nail cosmetic products which may be potentially irritating include nail hardeners, adhesives, nail treatments, polishes, artificial nail primers, as well as all types of UV gels, liquid/powder artificial nail products, polymers and wrap resins. These are all designed to be applied just to the natural nail. For these types of products, skin contact should be avoided, since they may potentially irritate living skin. Each of these can be safely applied to the natural nail plate during professional services, but they may also cause skin irritation or allergy if repeatedly exposed to the skin.

Allergic Skin Reactions

Some individuals' skin may become red, swollen, dry, itchy, cracked or develop tiny water blisters when overexposed to certain types of ingredients found in nail salon products. These ingredients are classified as potential "allergens" because they are capable of causing allergic reactions in people who have a sensitivity to them and include fragrances, preservatives and certain ingredients used in artificial nail products. Allergic skin reactions result when such ingredients (allergens) interact with the skin's immune system to create the skin symptoms described above. Usually allergic skin reactions are caused by prolonged and repeated contact to an allergen. For example, latex gloves can cause skin allergies. Prolonged and repeated contact for several months or even years can cause previously unaffected people to develop a persistent rash on the hands and wrists. In this case, sensitization is caused by naturally occurring proteins found in latex rubber that are acting as allergens.

Skin Protection is Important

Washing hands is one of the most important ways to avoid skin overexposure. Hands should be washed before and after performing each service and after handling any product not specifically designed for skin application. Properly wash hands by scrubbing for at least 20 seconds with a soft bristle scrub brush and mild liquid soap, thoroughly rinsing with warm water, then drying hands thoroughly. Harsh soap, hot water and hands that are often wet can also be the cause of irritation. Proper hand washing is an especially good way to prevent prolonged skin exposure. Allowing dusts, filings, sticky or oily substances, etc. to remain on the skin for prolonged periods can increase the risk of developing skin irritation or allergy. Once hands, wrist or arms become contaminated with product dusts or other residues, they should be properly cleaned and thoroughly dried. Product that splashes or spills onto clothing should be promptly removed and the clothing should be immediately changed to avoid prolonged contact with the underlying skin. The use of lotions can restore protective oils lost from hand washing, especially when harsh or drying cleansers are used or hands are washed many times per day.

Wearing the proper glove is another important way to protect the skin. Disposable nitrile gloves are the best choice for nail salon professionals. Latex and vinyl gloves are highly permeable to many product ingredients and should be avoided. Some individuals develop sensitivities to latex and cannot wear gloves made from this material. Those allergic to cornstarch (allergen) should avoid powdered gloves. For most salon uses, disposable gloves are best and should be discarded after a single use or if they become damaged or contaminated. The product's Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) contains important information regarding safe use, and usually describes the best glove to use. MSDS are available through your distributor or from the manufacturer.

Other Methods for Lowering Exposure

Controlling and lowering exposure to safe levels is the best way to protect the skin and keep it healthy. Avoid exposing hands to harsh cleaners, solvents or disinfectants. These may damage skin by removing natural oils (defatting), which may lead to skin dryness. Skin that is dry or irritated becomes more susceptible to penetration of ingredients that would normally be unable to pass through the natural barrier of the skin's surface.

Keeping containers, tabletops, clothing, tools and implements clean is equally important. A leaky container or one contaminated with product on the outside can cause repeated skin exposure with each handling. Arms or wrists exposed to product residues/dusts on contaminated tabletops or towels are also a potential source of overexposure. Handles of brushes and other implements should be kept clean and free from product residues.

Avoid allowing any type of artificial nail product to come in contact with living skin. Contact may cause clients to develop irritation and/or allergic skin reactions, which could worsen with each additional incident where direct skin exposure occurs. These types of skin reactions commonly occur on the finger, especially the cuticle area, as well as the wrists or arms, since these areas are often overexposed from incorrect application of artificial nail products.

Important Tips to Remember

- Wash hands thoroughly before and after performing each service, before eating, and after handling products or if accidental skin exposure occurs.
- Wear disposable nitrile gloves or the glove type recommended in the product MSDS.
- Replace gloves immediately if there are signs of cuts, tears, holes or contamination.
- Appropriate clothing can help prevent skin over exposure to products while performing professional services. For example, fitted long sleeved blouses or smocks for arms/wrist protection and knee length pants or skirts to help protect the lap.
- Keep containers tightly closed when not in use to prevent accidental spills or product leakage.
- Keep products in small-sized containers at the worktable to reduce the risk of spills and minimize skin exposure.
- When transferring products to smaller containers, wear the safety equipment recommended by the product MSDS, i.e. eye protection, gloves, etc.
- Always use a funnel or dropper to prevent spills and accidental skin contact while transferring products from their original containers.
- Avoid skin contact with disinfectants and never put them into the water with client's feet or hands.
- If there are visible signs of sensitivity or allergic reaction to a product, discontinue use immediately; if symptoms persist, consult with a physician.
- Exactly follow the manufacturers' product instructions and heed warnings, precautions, etc.
- Read and understand the MSDS for each product you use to perform your services.

Legal Notice

This document is intended to provide interested persons with helpful examples of procedures for use in the salon environment. This document is not intended to be a substitute for comprehensive training or requirements, or to prescribe rules or standards, or to define or create legal rights or obligations.

All persons involved in providing manicuring and enhancement services have the responsibility to determine that the procedures they practice comply with any current federal, state and local laws and regulations that may be applicable.

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401 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 2200
Chicago, Illinois 60611
p: 312.321.5161
ChicagoMidwestBeautyShow.com



Nail Manufacturers Council of the
Professional Beauty Association
15825 N. 71st Street, Suite 100
Scottsdale, AZ 85254-1521