

An illustration in shades of orange and yellow showing a hand being manicured. A hand with teal nail polish is being held by another hand, which is using a black nail file to shape the nail. The background is a soft, light yellow.

# HEALTHY SKIN HEALTHY NAIL TECHNICIANS

A Resource for Toronto  
Nail Salon Workers



Queen West  
Central Toronto  
Community Health Centre



Centre for  
Research Expertise  
in Occupational Disease

*Research that makes a Difference*



Cover and inside front cover illustrations by Bjoern Arthurs

# HOW CAN NAIL SALON WORK AFFECT MY SKIN?

*Your skin can become red, dry, cracked, scaly, swollen, tight, blistering, darkened, itchy, and/or painful and can affect your ability to work and enjoy daily activities. These effects can appear quickly, or after months or years of working at a salon.*



## **Chemicals**

Chemicals can get onto your skin directly through contact or indirectly through air. These chemicals are found in nail polishes, fingernail glues, artificial nails, removers, and disinfectants.



## **Water**

Nail salon work involves using lots of water. This keeps your hands wet and can also damage your skin.

# HOW CAN I PROTECT MY SKIN?



## Use safer products.

- Use products without formaldehyde (also known as formalin, methylene glycol), phthalates, and toluene.
- Use nail polish removers without acetone.
- Use nail polish thinners without toluene or methyl ethyl ketone.
- Read the Material Safety Data Sheet of the products, ask your employer where this is located or look online.



## Wear gloves and clothing that covers exposed skin.

- Wear nitrile gloves, not latex or vinyl.
- Change your gloves at least every 20 minutes, and with every customer.
- Wear cotton gloves under your nitrile gloves. These gloves are washable and reusable.
- Do not use gloves with holes or that are no longer clean.
- Wear long sleeved shirts and pants/long skirts to cover your arms and legs.



## Keep your skin clean.

- Wash between serving customers, before eating and when you think you have touched any chemicals.
- Wash your hands and arms for 15-20 seconds per area.
- Wash using a mild liquid soap and warm (not hot) water.
- Dry your hands fully.



## Be careful when taking off dirty gloves.

- Avoid touching the chemicals on the gloves when you are taking them off.



## Reduce your chemical exposure.

- Close bottles when not in use.
- Put garbage with chemicals into a closed bag, then throw into a trash can with a lid. Keep the lid closed.
- Take work breaks.
- Do not eat or drink at workstations or near chemicals.
- Increase air circulation by opening the front doors and using fans.
- Avoid wearing jewelry that can trap chemicals and water.



## Look at your skin and check for changes.

- Regularly look at your skin for any changes or problems like redness, dryness, cracks, swelling, or blisters.
- Talk to a doctor as soon as you see changes in your skin.
- The longer you wait, the harder it gets to treat it.
- Tell your doctor about your job as a nail salon worker.



## Moisturize your skin.

- Put cream or Vaseline on after washing hands, after work, and before bed.
- Here are some recommended lotions/creams:
- Moisturizers: Cetaphil Moisturizing Cream or Lotion, Cerave Moisturizing Cream or Lotion, Vaseline Creamy Problem Skin Therapy, Cliniderm Soothing Cream
- Hand care: Prevex, Cetaphil Barrier Cream, Cetaphil Restoraderm, Cerave Moisturizing Cream.

# YOU MAY BE THINKING...



**“I think I have a skin problem that is related to my work in a nail salon, but I’m not sure what to do about it.”**

Go see your family doctor or go to a community health centre/walk-in clinic. Tell them that you are worried about how your job is affecting your skin. Ask to see a dermatologist. If your doctor needs more information they can contact the St. Michael’s Hospital Occupational Health Clinic (416-864-5074) or Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (416-449-0009, [toronto@ohcow.on.ca](mailto:toronto@ohcow.on.ca)).



**“Following all the tips to protecting my hands would take too long and affect how I do my job.”**

The tips will become natural the more you do them. Plus they will help you stay healthy!



**“I have some skin changes, but it’s not bothering me right now.”**

Skin problems can start off mild, but the longer you wait the harder it will be to treat. Tell a doctor as soon as you notice skin changes.



**“It’s hard to understand chemical names and labels, since they are in English.”**

Ask your co-workers for help. They might have had the same problem, and know more about the products used at the salon.

There are many free language services in Toronto that can help. The Toronto District School Board also offers free English as a second language (ESL) classes to new immigrants. Local settlement groups like Findhelp ([www.211toronto.ca](http://www.211toronto.ca)) and Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants ([www.settlement.org](http://www.settlement.org)) can also help.



### **“The salon owner hasn’t talked about the skin protection steps in this booklet.”**

Owners also want a healthy salon. Consider speaking with them and showing them this booklet. If you would rather talk to someone outside of your workplace, consider contacting one of the local organizations listed at the end of this booklet.



### **“I don’t know where to get gloves.”**

Most pharmacies carry nitrile and cotton gloves, ask the pharmacist where to look for them.



### **“I can’t avoid doing what the customer wants.”**

Talk to your customers about using safer products and wearing protective gear – it means keeping them healthy too!



### **“I’m worried about the working conditions in my salon, what can I do?”**

If you think your work environment is dangerous or that you are not being treated fairly as a worker, you can report this to the Ontario Ministry of Labour or to the Toronto Public Health Complaints Officer.



### **“Where can I get more information on the hazards in nail salon work and how to protect myself?”**

Local organizations like your nearest community health centre, such as the Queen West – Central Toronto Community Health Centre in downtown Toronto.

Workplace health and safety groups that support all of Canada (e.g. National Network on Environments and Women’s Health, Health Canada on cosmetics product safety).

Some international groups also provide excellent information on nail salons (U.S. Department of Labour, California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, and U.K. Health and Safety Executive.)

# WHERE CAN I GET HELP AND/ OR MORE INFORMATION?

## WORK, ENVIRONMENT AND LAW ORGANIZATIONS

### **Ontario Ministry of Labour**

1-877-202-0008

### **Parkdale Community Legal Services**

[parkdalelegal.org](http://parkdalelegal.org)

416-531-2411

### **Workers' Action Centre**

[workersactioncentre.org](http://workersactioncentre.org)

416-531-0778

### **Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic**

[mtcsalc.org](http://mtcsalc.org)

416-971-9674

### **Toronto Public Health**

[toronto.ca](http://toronto.ca) > Living in Toronto > Health >  
Toronto Public Health > Contact Us >  
Feedback & Complaints

416-338-7600

### **Canadian Environmental Law Association**

[cela.ca](http://cela.ca)

416-960-2284 or  
1-844-755-1420

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT

### **Findhelp**

[211toronto.ca](http://211toronto.ca) > Newcomers >  
Interpretation/Translation

### **Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)**

[settlement.org](http://settlement.org) > Education > English as a  
Second Language (ESL)

### **ESL (English classes) Toronto District School Board (TDSB)**

[ESLtoronto.ca](http://ESLtoronto.ca)

416-338-4300

## GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

### **Health Canada – Consumer Product Safety for Cosmetics**

[hc-sc.gc.ca](http://hc-sc.gc.ca) > Consumer Product Safety >  
Cosmetics

## NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

### **Queen West – Central Toronto Community Health Centre (QW-CTCHC)**

416-703-8480

### **Toronto Healthy Nail Salon Network**

[facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/TOHealthyNailSalonNetwork)

[TOHealthyNailSalonNetwork](https://TOHealthyNailSalonNetwork)

### **National Network on Environments and Women's Health (NNEWH)**

[cwahn.ca/en/node/46338](http://cwahn.ca/en/node/46338)

### **California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative**

[cahealthynailsalons.org](http://cahealthynailsalons.org)

(Not a Canadian resource. Some information  
may not apply to Toronto; includes information in  
Vietnamese language)

### **Working Women's Community Center**

[www.workingwomencc.org](http://www.workingwomencc.org)  
(services in multiple languages)