



A RESOURCE FOR TORONTO NAIL SALON WORKERS

Information on skin, respiratory and reproductive health

This booklet is for nail technicians. It will help you learn more about how nail salon work may affect your health and give you information about lowering some of the risks to your health while you are working in a nail salon. This booklet includes:

- questions you may have about skin, respiratory and reproductive health
- information about the chemicals you work with;
- resources if you need additional help or information.

Because of the possible risks to your health, it is important that you protect yourself. This booklet gives you some ideas about how to do this.

This resource is available online in English, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean at **www.pqwchc/nails**

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**PARKDALE
QUEEN WEST**
Community
Health Centre

These are questions we hear from people who work in nail salons:

“How can nail salon work affect my health?”



The main source of health problems in nail salons are the chemicals found in many of the products used. They can get onto your skin directly through contact or indirectly through air. These chemicals are found in nail polishes, fingernail glues, artificial nails, polish removers, and disinfectants. Nail filing also sends dust into the air which can be harmful to your health.

Although many products do not include ingredients on the label, some of the products you use may show the name of the chemicals on the labels. Different chemicals have different effects.

“What are some of the chemicals in nail salon products that can be harmful to my health?”



- **TOLUENE** A solvent used in nail polish, polish remover and fingernail glue.
- **DIBUTYLPHTHALATES** “Plasticizers” used in nail polish.
- **FORMALDEHYDE** Used in nail polish as a hardener.
- **PARABENS** Used in nail polish as a preservative.
- **ACRYLAMIDES** Used to strengthen nails in the topcoat of some polishes.
- **TRIPHENYL PHOSPHATE (TPP OR TPHP)** A “plasticizer” used in some nail polishes.
- **METHYL ETHYL KETONE** Used as a solvent in nail polish removers.
- **CAMPHOR** (in synthetic form) Used as a plasticizer in nail polish.

“What can I do to protect myself from chemical exposure and dust particles in the air?”



- Whenever possible, 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.
- Open doors and windows and use fans to bring in fresh air.
- Proper ventilation is very important. This means the kind that captures the fumes at their source (**there are more details on this on page 10**).
- Wear gloves and clothing that protect your skin (wear nitrile gloves, not latex or vinyl).
- Moisturize your skin.
- Wear a mask to help keep out dust from filing and wear an N95 mask for further protection (**there are more details on this below**).
- Put garbage with chemicals in a closed bag.





- Throw the bag in a garbage with a lid and keep lid closed.
- Close bottles of chemicals when you are not using them.
- Take breaks away from your work station.
- Go outside for fresh air whenever you can.
- Do not eat or drink at your work station or near the place where chemicals are kept.
- When possible, don't bring babies or children into the salon
- Keep your skin clean.

“Are there other specific things I should know about my skin health?”



Nail salon work involves using lots of water. This means your hands are frequently wet which can also damage your 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:

- **Keep your skin clean:**

- Use a mild liquid soap and warm (not hot) water, wash thoroughly between serving customers, before eating and when you think you have touched any chemicals.
- Dry your hands completely.

- **Protect your skin with gloves:**

- 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.
- Remove gloves carefully; do not allow chemicals on gloves to touch your skin.
- Wear clothes to cover your arms and legs and change clothes when you get home.

- **Keep your skin moisturized:**

- Put cream or Vaseline on after washing hands, after work, and before bed.
- Here are some lotions/creams recommended by the St. Michael's Hospital Occupational Health Clinic:
 - **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

- **Watch for skin changes:**

- Regularly look at your skin for any changes or problems and if you see any changes, talk to a doctor and tell them you work in a nail salon. Skin problems can start off mild, but the longer you wait the harder it will be to treat. Tell a health care provider as soon as you notice skin changes.
- If you 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 or Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (**See contact information at end of this booklet.**)

“Are there other specific things I should know about my respiratory health?”



People who work in nail salons can develop problems with their lungs that can make breathing difficult. But there are things that nail salon workers can do, and measures that nail salon owners can take, to make the work environment healthier for both staff and customers.

How nail salon work can affect your lungs:

1. The products used in nail salons contain chemicals that can cause harm to the airways and the lungs. This is even more of a risk when someone is frequently exposed to the chemicals. Some of these chemicals – such as toluene, acetone, camphor - are “volatile”. This means they evaporate into the air at room temperature. Then nail salon workers and customers may inhale them. They are often called volatile organic compounds or VOCs.



2. A lot of dust is produced when artificial nails are filed. If this dust stays in the air, staff and customers may inhale it which can irritate the nose, throat, airways and lungs.
3. Some salons do not have good ventilation to help reduce the levels of chemicals and dust.
4. Procedures that nail technicians perform often require that their nose and mouth are close to the chemicals and dust. This increases the risk of harm to the nose, throat, airways and lungs.
5. Some nail technicians use latex gloves which can lead to latex allergies. These allergies can lead to asthma.

Symptoms to look out for:

- a scratchy throat or change in your voice
- coughing
- runny nose
- chest tightness
- shortness of breath



It's important that you speak to a health care provider if you are experiencing any of these symptoms or a combination of them, particularly if they are worse at work (or better when you are away from work).



Creating and applying **artificial nails** creates particular problems for respiratory health. The chemicals used to create artificial nails such as acrylates and solvents can irritate the nose, throat and lungs.

Respiratory health problems that have been connected to working in nail salons:

ASTHMA is a lung disease that makes it difficult to breathe. With asthma, the airways in the lungs become inflamed and more sensitive to irritants. When exposed to irritants, the airways can tighten up (constrict) which can cause the following symptoms:



- cough
- wheezing (like a whistle in the chest)
- shortness of breath
- and tightness in the chest.

Asthma can develop over months or years as a result of exposure to chemical vapours, dust particles, or other substances that can irritate the lungs.

RHINITIS is an inflammation of the lining of the nose. It can be caused by a viral infection, like a cold, or by exposure to chemicals, such as acrylates found in nail products.

Common symptoms of rhinitis include:



- stuffy or runny nose
- sneezing, mucus (phlegm) in the throat
- and cough.

If you experience any of the symptoms noted above, it is important to talk to a health care provider.



1. VENTILATION

One of the most important things that can be done to protect the respiratory health of everyone in nail salons is to **improve ventilation.**



Ventilation is the process by which air is delivered to, and removed from, a space. Natural ventilation means air is brought in from outdoors through opening doors and windows. Mechanical ventilation involves installing fans, ducts and other equipment to draw air in and out of a room and evenly distribute air throughout the space. Even when natural ventilation is available, mechanical ventilation is also important since it can provide more consistent and controlled air flow.

Using proper ventilation systems and opening doors and windows to help air circulation in the salon can reduce chemical and dust exposure for everyone in the salon.

Types of ventilation

Ceiling-mounted or wall-mounted **general** exhaust fans (venting outdoors) are an important requirement in any nail salon. However, although they will help to dilute the concentration of chemicals in the air, they do not remove them as effectively as local exhaust systems.

Local exhaust ventilation (also called “bench ventilation” or “source capture”) is the best form of ventilation to protect your health and that of the clients. This is a system where the fumes and dust particles are pulled away at the source of your work, preventing it from getting into the air and then into your lungs. It is important that the capture occurs close to your work and that the air is sent to the outdoors through a duct system.

2. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Personal protective equipment (PPE) will NOT completely protect you from the chemicals, but it may reduce the level of exposure. If hazardous chemicals exist in the workplace, and if it is not possible or practical to improve the ventilation at this time, using PPE is the next best option.

Some nail technicians wear **dust masks or surgical masks**. While they may reduce exposure to large dust particles and reduce exposure to germs, **they do not protect against chemical exposures and small dust particles**: you need to change them often.

An **N95 respirator mask** can provide more protection than a dust or surgical mask. An **N95 respirator mask** can protect against both large and small dust particles and germs, but **they do not protect against exposures to gases**. They require proper fit testing by a trained fitter to ensure they create a proper seal. You need to replace them frequently.



The Lung Association and Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers can help to connect salon owners with an occupational hygienist who can advise on the best ways to improve air quality in the salon.



“Are there specific things I should know about my reproductive health?”



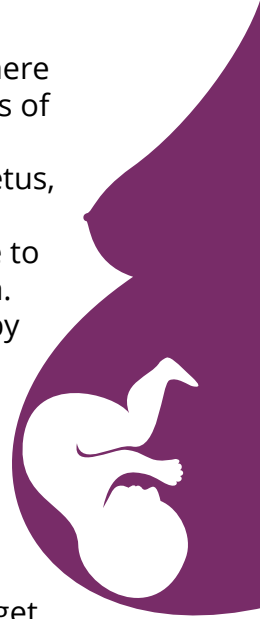
Some research shows that being exposed to certain chemicals used in nail salons

- may make it more difficult to get pregnant;
- may cause miscarriages;
- may harm the fetus developing in the mother.

Because of the possible risks from chemical exposures, if you are sexually active, you may choose to use a birth control method while you are working in a nail salon. Your family doctor or nurse practitioner, as well as a number of clinics, can help you plan a pregnancy and can help you decide on the method of birth control that is best for you.

If you are already pregnant or plan to get pregnant, the time of highest risk to a fetus from chemical exposure is during your first three months of pregnancy. Although it is not always possible to plan a pregnancy, there are ways you can reduce your exposure: see above.

Many women who become pregnant while they are working in a nail salon have healthy babies. However, sometimes there can be problems. There are tests that doctors can do in the early months of pregnancy to see if the fetus appears healthy. If you are concerned about the health of your fetus, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about getting more information. Some women choose to end their pregnancy. Abortion is legal in Canada. It is a medical procedure, private, and covered by your health insurance. In addition to talking to your doctor or nurse practitioner, or visiting a community health centre, you can call Toronto Public Health's InfoLine – **all listed at the back of this booklet** – for a list of sexual health clinics and abortion clinics.




If you are trying to have a baby and you do not get pregnant, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about what you can do. They may refer you to a fertility specialist. You can also learn more about your fertility online. **See fertility information services at the back of this booklet.**

A few more points...



- If your salon owner has never raised the issues in this booklet, remember that owners also want a salon that will be appealing to customers. And they probably don't want to see their nail technicians getting sick from their work.
- 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.

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- Some owners are more willing than others to talk about switching to safer products or getting better ventilation. Here are some ideas that may help:
 - Tell them if some customers have complained about the smells and effects of your products, such as difficulty breathing or headaches.
 - Tell them that a healthier salon is better for everybody.
 - If you find it hard to understand chemical names and labels, because 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) and Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (www.ocasi.org) can also help.
 - If you have concerns about the working conditions in your salon, there are things you can 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. The Workers Action Centre may also be able to help. **Contact details are available at the end of this booklet.**



For more help and information:

Many of the resources below are specific to people living in Ontario. You do not need health insurance or proof of your immigration status to use most of these resources.

INFORMATION ON DANGEROUS CHEMICALS AND PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH

Women's Voices for the Earth

www.womensvoices.org/safe-salons

California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative

www.cahealthynailsalons.org

Booklet:

*Stay Healthy and Safe While
Giving Manicures and Pedicures*


Available in English, Vietnamese
and Chinese

www.osha.gov/Publications/3542nail-salon-workers-guide.pdf

HEALTH SERVICES


Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre

Services in English,
translation available

 416-703-8480 ext 2233
168 Bathurst St., Toronto
1229 Queen St. West, Toronto
www.pqwchc.org


IWHC Toronto (formerly Immigrant Women's Health Centre)

Services in multiple languages

 489 College St., Suite 200, Toronto
416-323-9986
www.immigranthealth.info

South Riverdale Community Health Centre

Services in English,
translation available

 955 Queen St. East, Toronto
416-461-1925
www.srchc.ca

SKIN HEALTH


St. Michael's Hospital Occupational Health Clinic

416-864-5074

LUNG/RESPIRATORY HEALTH

The Lung Association (Ontario)


Work-related asthma resources are
available in several languages.

18 Wynford Dr, Suite 401
Toronto, ON M3C 0K8
Tel: (416) 864-9911
 Toll free: 1-888-344-5864
Fax: 1-888-864-9430
lungontario.ca

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Toronto Public Health AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine

For information and referrals
to sexual health clinics, for birth
control, pregnancy test, STI testing
and abortion counselling

 416-392-2437 or 1-800-668-2437
www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=d7f87dbbfd510410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD

Office on Women's Health

www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/you-get-pregnant/trying-conceive

Justisse Method of Fertility Management

www.justisse.ca

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT

 Call 211 or visit www.211.ca

LEGAL SERVICES


Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA)

Services in English

 416-960-2284
www.cela.ca


Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic

Provide legal services to low income, non-English speaking clients from the Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian communities across Ontario.

 Toll free: 1-844-971-9674
www.csalc.ca

Parkdale Community Legal Services

Services in English, translation available
1266 Queen St. West, Toronto

 416-531-2411
www.parkdalelegal.org

LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT

KCWA Family and Social Services

*services in English and Korean
5075 Yonge Street, Suite 401,
North York

 416-340-1234
www.kcwa.net

Workers' Action Centre

Support for workers and workers' rights. Services in multiple languages
720 Spadina Ave. Suite 223, Toronto,
ON M5S 2T9

Workers' Help Line:

416-531-0778

Toll free: 1-855-531-0778

www.workersactioncentre.org

Working Women's Community Centre

Services in multiple languages
533A Gladstone Ave., Toronto

 416-532-2824
www.workingwomencc.org


Employment Standards Information Centre

 416-326-7160

www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es


Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (Toronto clinic)

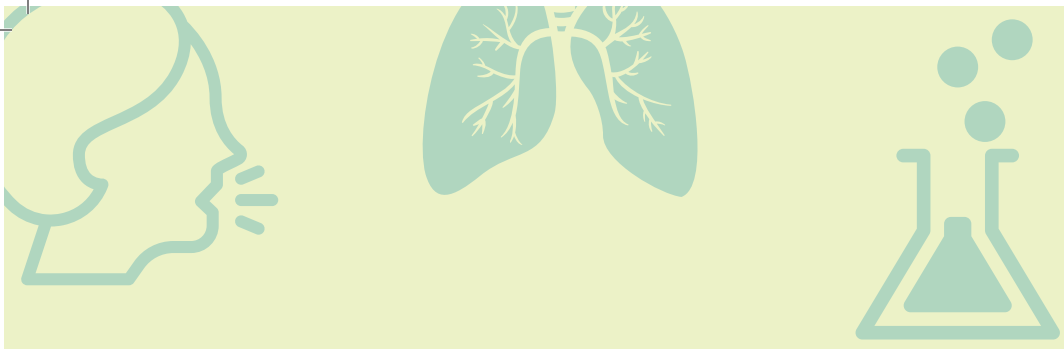
970 Lawrence Ave West, Suite 110
Toronto, ON M6A 3B6

 Tel: 416-449-0009
Toll free: 1-877-817-0336
Fax: 416-449-7772
www.ohcow.on.ca

Workplace Safety and Prevention Services

An information source for safety training and compliance; can provide fitting for N95 masks.

 5110 Creekbank Rd,
Mississauga, ON L4W 0A1
1-877-494-9777
www.wsps.ca



**To make a confidential
complaint about health
conditions in your workplace:**

City of Toronto - Body Safe

Contact the Toronto Public Health
Complaints Officer:

☎ 416-338-7600


Email: tphfeedback@toronto.ca

**Ontario Ministry of Labour -
Health and Safety
Contact Centre**

* translation available

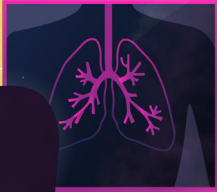
☎ Toll free: 1-877-202-0008

[www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/
es/forms/claim.php](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/forms/claim.php)





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This booklet was produced by the **Nail Salon Workers Project** (Toronto) with funding from the Ministry of Labour, the Dragonfly Fund at Tides Canada and The Lung Association. The project is a collaboration between the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre and the Healthy Nail Salon Network. We would like to thank the following people for help in creating this resource: Prof. Victoria Arrandale, Jennifer Chung Lim, Dr. Linn Holness, and Lyba Spring.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the Nail Salon Workers Project and do not necessarily reflect those of any of our funders.

Access the resources for nail salons created by this project at:



<http://tiny.cc/yj3gbz>



Facebook: Healthy Nail Salon Network - Toronto



Twitter: @TOHealthyNails



Contact us at: nailsalonproject@ctchc.com



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