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Features

Make sure beauty treatment is performed by licensed professional

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Michelle Lee, an instructor at the Honolulu Nail Academy, gets a manicure from Etsuyo Sold, one of the students at the school.

After a terrible experience at a nail salon on the Windward side that she believes left her with a fungal infection, Florence Battle of Kailua now does her own nails.

Battle, 65, still recalls the ordeal that took place three years ago.

Do

>> Check to see whether your nail salon and the employees are licensed. Licenses should be posted on the wall in a visible place.

>> Consult a podiatrist first if you have diabetes or poor circulation in your feet.

>> Consider bringing your own pedicure utensils to the salon. Bacteria and fungus can move easily from one person to the next if the salon doesn't use proper sterilization techniques.

>> Look to see whether the stations are clean. Does the nail technician wash his or her hands between clients? Are there dirty tools lying around? Ask how tools are cleaned.

Don't

>> Use the same tools for both the manicure and pedicure, as bacteria and fungus can transfer between fingers and toes.

>> Allow technicians to use a foot razor to remove dead skin. If used incorrectly, it can result in permanent damage and cause infection.

>> Cut cuticles, which serve as a protective barrier against bacteria. Cutting cuticles increases the risk of infection.

Source: American Academy of Dermatology, American Podiatric Medical Association

"It was the worst experience of my life," she said. "I was horrified because I'm a very clean person. I've always been very good about taking care of my feet. I'm sure I picked it up from there."

Battle, a former tattoo shop owner now studying to be a medical assistant, also recalled the terrible customer service she received.

While her feet went into a bubbling tub, the nail technician, who spoke little English, never so much as acknowledged her as she did the pedicure, Battle said, and the job was a little rough and done quickly.

"In retrospect, when I look back, we are taking a risk any time we do something like that because we're soaking our feet in a container that might get rinsed in between people. But you don't know who was in there."

With the proliferation of nail shops in Honolulu offering inexpensive services, a "mani-pedi" has become a regular beauty ritual for many women and men, along with facials, waxing and similar treatments. Negative experiences like Battle's, which provide fodder for online reviews, may have customers wondering, "Just who is doing my nails?"

The state Board of Barbering and Cosmetology oversees a broad swathe of the industry, from hairdressers to estheticians and nail technicians as well as barbershops, beauty schools and instructors.

The board requires that cosmetologists, the jacks-of-all-trades in the industry, complete 1,800 hours of formal training, while estheticians must complete 600 hours and nail technicians, 350 hours.

Those who don't undergo formal schooling, working instead as an apprentice in a nail shop, must complete 700 hours of on-the-job training.

Estheticians can perform facials as well as waxing services, and nail technicians can massage a person's hands, arms, legs and feet but are allowed to work only on fingernails and toenails.

A cosmetologist can provide the services of an esthetician, hairdresser and nail technician.

THE STATE'S Regulated Industries Complaints Office, the enforcement arm of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, is charged with investigating complaints of professional misconduct and unlicensed activity. Violations can bring fines of between \$100 to \$1,000. The state Health Department is responsible for enforcing sanitation rules, but due to the higher priority placed on foodborne illnesses, it no longer does routine inspections of beauty parlors and no longer issues clearance certificates, according to Peter Oshiro, Sanitation Branch chief.

In Hawaii, unlicensed activity is probably the most common violation in the beauty industry, according to Daria Loy-Goto, complaints and enforcement officer for RICO.

"What we tell consumers is, check to see if the person is licensed," she said. "They can check the (department's) website 24/7 or call our office. The other thing they can check is complaint history."

When entering any nail or beauty salon, consumers should look for the shop's license as well as the licenses of individual workers posted in public view, along with a sign that reads, "Price list available upon request." Anyone working as an apprentice must identify themselves as such with a name tag, Loy-Goto said.

In 2015 RICO investigated 139 complaints in the barbering and cosmetology industry. Hawaii has an estimated 7,714 actively licensed beauty operators in Hawaii.

Many salons offer several beauty services under one roof, but individual employees are limited by what their licenses allow them to do, according to Loy-Goto. For example, a nail technician is not supposed to wax brows or tint eyelashes.

"We do tell consumers to check to see if the operator who's going to be providing the specific service is licensed," she said.

Also, licensees are required to be either a U.S. citizen, a national or an alien authorized to work in the U.S.

SANITATION is an equally important issue for consumers to consider. Under state sanitation rules, beauty shops must have hot and cold running water, while towels that come into contact with the customer's skin or hair must be laundered and sanitized. Razors, scissors, tweezers and shears must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized between clients — and the same goes for the foot tub.

Some states, such as Texas but not Hawaii, have stricter rules that require beauty shops and nail salons providing mani-pedis to sterilize all reusable, stainless-steel instruments in an autoclave, using superheated steam and high pressure.

Jessica R. Taylor, a senior instructor at the Honolulu Nail Academy, said an essential lesson for her students is that clients who appear to have a fungal infection should not be accepted. This is done to help prevent the spread of the condition to other clients, she said, but many salons do not follow this rule.

Even if students speak English as a second language, Taylor said they can communicate effectively using pictures.

"There are so many unlicensed people working and doing whatever they want, it gives our whole industry a bad rap," she added. "It's unfortunate."

At the Honolulu Nail Academy, students must pass a written exam to receive a certificate of completion and a transcript of hours to apply for a state license. The state requires a written exam but not a practical test of skills.

At the academy's learning salon in Waikiki, students are taught to scrub all the reusable tools — nippers, cuticle pushers and clippers — with soap and water. The tools are then soaked in hospital-grade disinfectant and rinsed, dried and stored in a non-airtight container.

"If they're not cleaning their tools prior to putting them in a disinfectant solution, if it goes straight from the table or client to the solution, they're not doing it properly," she said. "That does become an issue, especially with pedicures."

Foot tubs also should be cleaned and disinfected properly, she said. Some have a plastic liner that should be discarded between clients. Pedicure thrones featuring whirlpool-type bubbles also need to have disinfectant run through the piping. Otherwise, she said, "it's like taking a bath with all the neighbors."

In addition to providing good customer service, Taylor believes nail technicians play as much of a role in educating their clients as they do in treating them.

"We need to educate the consumer on what to look for," she said. "It makes a difference in whether (they) return or not."

Get schooled

Honolulu Nail Academy — Eaton Square, 438 Hobron Lane, Suite 207-208, 305 — offers a range of classes, including evening and weekend sessions. A learning salon that offers discounted services is on the second floor (\$10 for a hand gel polish to \$15 for a pedicure). Call 944-1121 or visit honolulunailacademy.com.

To report unlicensed activity, call the DCCA Consumer Resource Center at 587-4272 or go to cca.hawaii.gov/rico/file-a-complaint. An informational brochure is available at cca.hawaii.gov/rico.