

# Nail Technician's Tips for Health & Safety

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## Introduction

Every industry has workplace health and safety hazards, including nail technology. These hazards can cause illness and injury, can come from many sources and sometimes might initially appear insignificant – like a wet floor or an instrument used on more than one client without proper cleaning. Chemicals, like those used in acrylics and polish removers, can pose a health risk. Many of these workplace illnesses and injuries can be prevented, often by simple precautions.

Listed below are some simple explanations about workplace health and safety and some common workplace hazards with suggestions on what to do about them.

## What is Occupational Health and Safety?

Occupational health and safety (OHS) is a planned system of working to prevent illness and injury where you work by recognising and identifying hazards. The law says you must identify the hazards where you are working and decide how dangerous they are. Then you have to find ways to remove them or separate people from them.

## Risk Management

An essential part of any OHS program is risk management. This is a logical step-by-step approach, which, if followed, can reduce the likelihood of injury and disease in the workplace.

Always try to assess every single task in terms of risk: that is, identify the hazard, assess the risk and do something to control it.

## What about Nail Technicians?

Many of the hazards for a nail technician are the same as for clients, but wherever you work, it will be you who is responsible for the health and safety of the client. First, you must be aware of the different types of risks you will be exposed to in your work. These include:

- chemical – as in acrylics, polishes and removers
- biological – as in transmission of live organisms or pathogens like hepatitis, and
- physical – as in injury due to poor posture, repetitive movements or even slipping over on spilled liquid.

**It is not always easy to control your work environment because many nail technicians work in other people's homes, from mobile vans or even their own homes.**

Mobile nail technicians may provide their own portable table to improve their comfort, but the products that they are taking on the road – some highly flammable – could be kept in an insulated container like an esky, with cold blocks to keep their temperature low.

In a client's home, think like you would in a salon. Look around and try to imagine the possible risks. In a salon environment you would have ventilation – possibly directly at the work area. This may not be possible in a client's home, so unless you are in a bathroom with an exhaust fan working, open windows and doors to release the fumes.

While a client would be responsible for hazards as part of the environment in their own home – like sitting on a broken chair - you as the nail technician are responsible for the hazards you introduce or control as part of your job. This would include materials and products, wastes, chemical fumes, which may be hazardous and ergonomic, or postural safety, as far as possible.

## **Protecting Your Skin**

Nail technicians can suffer from skin disorders for various reasons. Constant hand washing or reaction to chemical handling can break down the skin's natural barriers. Dermatitis is a skin inflammation caused by exposure to irritants and is the most common skin disorder encountered by nail technicians. The two main forms of dermatitis are primary irritant dermatitis and allergic dermatitis.

Primary irritant dermatitis is a toxic reaction on the skin. It can be reduced by wearing gloves (preferably disposable plastic or Nitrile) and frequent moisturising of the skin.

Allergic dermatitis is caused by a chemical irritant known as a sensitiser. This condition may take longer to develop and causes mild to severe dermatitis or eczema. Ensure that your skin is not in contact with the product and nail dust.

## **Respiratory Irritations and Asthma**

Ingredients in many nail products may cause respiratory irritations and trigger asthma attacks. Nail powders contain polymers, which are known nose and throat irritants. Reactions to these chemicals can vary but include nausea, headaches and respiratory problems including asthma. Acrylic materials used in nail products typically contain methacrylates – either ethyl or methyl methacrylate. Methacrylates can trigger asthma and high concentrations may cause central nervous system depression. Remember all chemicals if not handled correctly can pose a health risk.

## What to Do

### For safety you can:

- wear protective gloves and change these after each client (preferably cotton lined or plastic disposable – nitrile gloves produce less allergic reactions than latex) Barrier creams are not effective,
- avoid direct contact with products that contain known sensitisers such as nail polishes, acrylic liquids or removers containing solvents,
- moisturise hands regularly, generic brand sorbolene cream with glycerin is an effective and cheap moisturiser,
- wash skin with a pH neutral soap after skin contact with chemicals and then moisturise
- reduce handling of the hazardous substance where possible. Try to keep the amount of use small to minimise evaporation, or try to ensure lids are replaced on substances when not in immediate use, and
- wear a dust mask when filing acrylic nails, or use a down draft manicure table if possible. These tables can be a good investment, but proper maintenance and cleaning of filters is a must. They can be teamed with armrests to provide better ergonomic stability for nail technician and client. If a ventilation table is not available to you, then use exhaust fans or ventilation close to the source of the chemical and dust.

## Hygiene

A clean, tidy workplace is essential for good health and safety. A dirty workplace can result in slips and falls, which may cause injury. More importantly, it can also contribute to infection by providing an unhygienic environment where bacteria can thrive.

### For health and safety you should:

- regularly clean floors to ensure that they are free from nail dust, clippings and so on
- immediately clean up any spilt oil, chemicals, water, etc
- remove rubbish including boxes, or obstacles regularly from walkways
- change towels and all linen after each client, and
- all instruments should be disinfected or cleaned after use.

## Risk of Disease

Infections like hepatitis and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) make it vital to have high standards of cleanliness, personal hygiene and infection control. Hepatitis, HIV and other diseases are spread by blood and body fluids and it is essential that equipment (especially if contaminated by blood) is thoroughly cleaned/disinfected and that strict codes of work and personal hygiene are followed.

In addition to these well-known health issues, nail technicians face special infection issues. Artificial fingernails are known to harbour more harmful bacteria (like staphylococcus) and yeasts (like candida) than natural nails and handwashing is not enough to remove these pathogens. Nail technicians need to be aware that their own artificial nails may transfer infection to clients and clients may transfer infection to the technician.

Dermatologists also warn that excessive filing and buffing can cause nail trauma and also put the recipient at greater risk of bacterial or yeast infections.

Bumps to nails and even over-zealous filing or buffing can tear the skin and allow dirt and germs to enter. Remember never cut the cuticle. If the nail is re-glued without proper cleaning, bacteria and fungi may grow in between nails and spread to the natural nail. Remember to clean the nail with alcohol before applying the new nail. Also, if the space between the artificial and natural nail is not regularly filled, then this space can increase the risk of infection.

Fungal infections can also occur if artificial nails are left on too long – more than three months. Moisture accumulates under the nail creating a perfect environment for bugs to grow.

## **What to Do**

### **For safety, always:**

- wash your hands and your client's hands thoroughly with soap and water before beginning
- wash your hands after contact with blood or after removing gloves
- check for any cuts and abrasions and cover them with waterproof dressings, and
- always wash hands before and after working, going to the toilet, eating, drinking and smoking.

## **Managing Exposure to Blood or Other Body Substances**

Every nail technician should understand clearly what to do if they are exposed to blood or other body substances. After exposure to blood or other body substances the nail technician should:

- encourage bleeding if the exposure involves a cut or puncture, then wash with liquid soap and water
- wash with liquid soap and water where the exposure does not involve a cut or puncture
- if eyes are splashed, rinse them while they are open gently but thoroughly with water or normal saline
- if blood or other body substances get in to the mouth, spit out and then rinse the mouth with water several times
- if clothing is soiled, remove clothing and shower if necessary
- report the incident immediately to your supervisor if there is one, and
- seek medical advice as soon as possible.

You may wish to have immunisation against hepatitis B and also consider immunisation against tetanus. Discuss this with your local public health unit or doctor. As with most immunisation, regular boosters are needed.

## **IF A CLIENT BLEEDS DURING THE COURSE OF A PROCEDURE THE NAIL TECHNICIAN SHOULD:**

- put on clean disposable gloves (if not already wearing them)
- place a clean dressing on the wound and apply pressure to stop the bleeding
- place soiled, disposable sharp equipment into a sharps or similar container
- dispose of soiled dressings into a waste bin
- place soiled, reusable equipment into a labelled container (for example Soiled Equipment)
- clean the work area surfaces, that is benches, chairs or floors that have become soiled with blood or other body substances, as soon as possible with water and detergent, removing all visible soil using a disposable cloth
- dispose of cloths used for wiping up blood
- remove gloves, dispose of them and wash hands thoroughly.

## **Personal Protective Equipment**

In some situations personal protective equipment (PPE) may be the most practical and effective way to minimise risk. Examples of PPE are gloves, aprons and dust masks, where needed, and safety glasses, which should be worn when cleaning equipment or mixing chemicals. Be aware that contact lenses are not PPE and should not be worn by nail technicians as they make the eye extremely difficult to clean in case of accident and some vapours can make them melt.

## **Cleaning Equipment Properly**

All equipment must be cleaned as soon as it is used. A special area should be set aside for cleaning, and plastic or nitrile gloves worn during the entire process.

### **To clean equipment, always:**

1. pre rinse equipment in cold water
2. wash in tepid water and detergent taking extra care with hard-to-reach areas. Hold the item under water and carefully scrub with a clean brush
3. equipment which cannot be washed must be wiped clean with 70 per cent alcohol on a clean cotton pad, and
4. dry and store in a dust-free environment.

## **As Well**

### **To minimise the risk of infection, always:**

- use disposable equipment, if possible
- clean equipment thoroughly after each client
- treat all body substances such as blood as potentially infectious – always wear gloves, and
- make sure all sharp equipment is disposed of in a safe manner.

## Storing Chemicals Safely

Safety is not just limited to directions for use. Storage, accurate labelling and tidiness are important safety issues if you are to handle and use chemicals properly. When storing chemicals always:

- store chemicals in original containers. Never pour chemicals into unwashed containers or put them into food or drink bottles
- if chemicals are put into a different container or the original label is not clear, then relabel the chemicals immediately with the name of the product and the appropriate safety and risk phrases
- clearly mark unlabelled containers with the words "Caution. Do not use. Unknown substance". Then phone your local council for the correct disposal method. Every council has dedicated chemical disposal days each year. Household holders are notified. There are also certain tip sites where chemicals can be disposed of, though usually for a fee.
- never mix chemicals that are not intended for mixing together. Check the MSDS or ask the supplier if you are unsure
- clean up any spilled chemicals following the clean-up instructions on the MSDS
- store all nail chemicals away from cleaning and hairdressing products and foodstuffs
- use and store flammable chemicals (most nail technician's chemicals are highly flammable) away from heat, flame and ignition sources like dryers and hot water systems
- never allow smoking in the nail technician's work environment, and
- replace lids on containers when you have finished with them.

## Protection from Chemicals

It is important to know what types of chemical hazards you are working with and being exposed to.

If you are the owner or operator of a workplace, the law says you must:

- provide information about these substances
- find out what the risks are and how to control them (risk assessment)
- provide training in the safe use of these substances, and
- keep records, including a register of hazardous substances, Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS), risk assessments and training records.

## Who Supplies What

The risks of a chemical will depend on its concentration and volatility (how quickly it becomes vapourised), how it is stored and how it is used. The law requires you to have chemical information sheets or MSDS for each hazardous substance in your workplace,

to label these substances properly and to keep a register listing them.

Manufacturers or suppliers must label each product with the right risk and safety phrases and provide MSDS if the product contains a hazardous substance.

All nail technicians or employers must ensure that they have the MSDS and see that any chemicals poured into new containers are clearly relabelled with the same information as is on the original container.

Manufacturers have already developed standard MSDS for each product. If you do not have them, contact your supplier. An MSDS cannot be more than five years old.

## **Keeping Track**

You must keep records of your own risk assessments of chemicals. At the back of this kit are examples of how these records should be kept. You can photocopy these samples and use them for your own record taking.

## **A First Step**

One of the first steps in risk assessment is to read the label and MSDS from your supplier or manufacturer. If the product contains a hazardous substance, then a risk assessment must be carried out to determine whether control measures are needed or if the control measures in place are adequate.

## **Involve Everyone**

If you are a salon owner, you are responsible for informing staff, and if you are an owner operator, then make yourself aware of risk assessment. Talking to staff about risk assessment and OHS issues should be an ongoing process and they can often provide ideas on how to improve risk situations.

## **Posture and Physical Injury**

Many nail technicians experience problems with upper body injuries caused by having to maintain awkward postures of the upper body and limbs while performing highly repetitive tasks. Ergonomic assessment of the work of nail technicians found there are high injury risk factors attached to the nail technician's duties.

This includes repetition, forcefulness of hand movements (as in filing and buffing), uncomfortable postures held for long periods (like bent neck), and in a thriving business, little recovery time between sessions.

Injuries include musculo-skeletal disorders, also known as repetitive strain injuries (RSI) or cumulative trauma disorders. These can include injuries like myalgia, carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis and tenosynovitis. Scientific studies show neck, shoulders, arms, hands, and fingers are at significant risk of injury unless efforts are made to reduce the

problem areas.

## **What to Do**

**To minimise potential injury, you can:**

- vary tasks as much as possible to allow recovery time for muscles
- adjust the height of the chair to ensure that arms are in a comfortable position and your head is not constantly bent too far forward as you work
- manage bookings to rotate the lengthy, demanding tasks if possible
- store all objects between knee and shoulder height
- avoid swivelling your body while working and try to move your feet in the same direction as you are turning, and
- do finger stretching exercises and rotation of wrists, shoulders and neck.

## **Layout and Furniture**

Equally important is the location of materials and equipment. Often the emphasis is on what looks good rather than practicality and comfort.

**You should:**

- encourage staff to wear comfortable clothing, including footwear
- ensure that work stations are at the right height for the relevant tasks, such as manicure tables at the right height and reception desks at a comfortable standing height, and
- use height-adjustable chairs with good back support.

## **How to Assess a Risk**

Risk assessment means that you have to find out what chemicals are used what the hazards are and how to control them.

The best control measure is the one that provides the best protection and which is practical to use.

You may also find that hazardous substances are not only confined to nail products. For example, you might be using a cleaning product or be working in a hairdressing salon where other chemicals are in use.

In most cases, there are practical solutions, including following the 'precautions for use' listed on MSDS, for controlling the risk. In conducting a risk assessment, you should:

**Divide your work into tasks:**

Look at each process used in a nail technician's work. For example, removing polish, filing and buffing nails, applying acrylic mixtures and filling up. Include all work processes, including cleaning the workspace or equipment.



**Identify all substances used in the process:**

Look at all the substances that you use, including products for cleaning as well as nail care and other beauty items.

**Design a way to deal with the hazards:**

Look at the MSDS to see if they are hazardous substances and then follow safety information. Try to reduce any risks by changing the work process or substituting a safer chemical.

**Record the assessment:**

Make notes of what you have done. Photocopy the appropriate Assessment Record Card included with this booklet and fill in the relevant columns. Keep your assessment records with your MSDS and training records in this folder.

**Review the assessment:**

You should review your risk assessment every five years and you must do a new risk assessment if there are changes in the workplace or in the products used.

If you need more information on how to carry out a risk assessment, see the Worksafe Australia book: Guidance Note for the Assessment of Health Risks Arising from the use of Hazardous Substances at the Workplace.

Copies of this booklet are available from the WorkCover bookshop.

## Professional Help

In some cases, you may need to use an expert like an occupational hygienist to identify the hazards and the effectiveness of the control measures. WorkCover has experts who can help identify and evaluate the hazardous substances in your workplace.

## Training

Nail technicians must know how to use hazardous substances safely. They need to know what the health effects are if not handled correctly.

**Training should cover:**

- the risk assessment process
- reading and understanding labels and MSDS and where MSDS are kept
- safe handling and work practices
- the use of PPE like gloves and eye protectors
- clean-up of spills, and
- emergency procedures and first aid.

Training should take into account literacy levels and language barriers and it should be practical, with hands-on sessions.

Training needs to be updated when there is a change in the hazardous substances used or if different control methods are used.

You must also keep records of the training provided to staff.

## **Acknowledgements/Bibliography**

This publication has been developed in consultation with WorkCover NSW, NSW Health and Nail Technician industry representatives.

*Written by Adrienne Riddell for the Department for Women - Produced by the Department for Women, October 2000 ISBN 0 7310 5247 1 ISBN 0 7310 5246 3 (set)*



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ISBN 0 7310 5246 3