

Some Nail Salons Are Little Shops of Horrors

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spectors.

Weir says the board, funded by licensing and exam fees, has tried introducing legislation to get more inspectors to enable inspections at least once every two years. It was vetoed. The board asked the state if it could spend more money on inspectors. It was turned down.

Now, a bill is in the works that would require inspections once a year at barber and beauty shops. The boards overseeing both will merge into one barbering and cosmetology board in July 1992.

Customers, meanwhile, have complained about everything from nails rotting and falling off to getting yeast infections from manicures.

Shirley Thomas, enforcement coordinator for the state cosmetology board, hears it all:

One woman alleged that a manicure gave her warts all around her cuticles. Fungus and molds are the most common problem. Fingernails can fall off or separate from the skin if artificial nails aren't applied properly.

"This sounds pretty gross, but some people's fingers will start throbbing the night after a manicure,

and by the time they get their (artificial) nails off, they might have pus coming out from under their nails."

In a few cases, people have lost their nails permanently. "It's likely it came from the manicure," says Thomas.

"The problem is", she says, "it's very hard to prove".

"You need a preponderance of evidence. If somebody has a yeast infection, their doctor's not going to ask if they had a manicure recently."

About half the violations at beauty salons in the past year were of health and safety rules, says Denise Ostton, executive officer of the state Board of Cosmetology. "In manicuring establishments it was usually in the area of nondisinfection of the equipment."

It's Appalling

"I have been going out getting manicured on my own, and I am quite appalled at what I see," says Jeanine Ackerly, who owns a one-woman shop, California Nail Works, in Presidio Heights.

"Among the newer salons, they're not as clean, not following the law," says Elana Laub, co-owner of six Beauty stores in San Francisco, and a client of Ackerly's.

HOW TO FIND A SANITARY MANICURIST

Here are some things to look for when you get a manicure, according to Board of Cosmetology rules.

* Nonelectrical instruments with sharp points or edges that may pierce the skin and draw blood (such as tweezers, cuticle nippers, manicure-pedicure scissors) must be cleaned before use with soap or detergent and water, then totally immersed in 70 percent isopropyl alcohol for at least 10 minutes.

* Disinfectant solutions must remain covered and be changed at least once a week or whenever visibly cloudy or dirty.

* Disinfected instruments must be stored in a clean, covered place such as a

plastic container, sealed plastic bag or towel.

■ Instruments that contact a patron and cannot be disinfected, such as cotton pads and Emory boards, should be thrown away immediately after use.

It is misdemeanor to practice cosmetology without a license. A poster of the rules is sent out with the license. The inspector's first priority is to follow up consumer complaints, says Jeff Weir, assistant executive officer of the board.

For a copy of a Consumer Complaint Guide, or for more information, write to the Board of Cosmetology, P.O. Box 944226, Sacramento, Calif., 94244-2260.

When Laub lost her longtime personal manicurist, she saw firsthand the little beauty shops of horrors she had heard about from clients.

She checked out four places in San Francisco. None looked clean.

There were nail polishes and glues stuck together, and one place didn't change the towels.

"When you lose a manicurist it's like you lose a lover. It's a treat, it's an intimacy, it's hand-holding.

... You want it to be pleasant, you want the surroundings to be attractive," says Laub.

"You've got to be very careful, for the benefit of yourself and your client," adds Jo Ann Loitz, owner of Nail-Fun-Nail-Ya in Pleasanton. She keeps duplicate instruments so others can be sanitized at the same time.

Search for Good Nails

In her own search for good nails, Ackerly found about three out of four places unsanitary. One manicurist didn't wash her hands and didn't ask Ackerly to, pushed her cuticles when they were dry and cut them against her request.

Ackerly's \$17 manicures include a soak in whipped soap and lotion, a hand massage and four coats of polish. She does not cut cuticles.

She does have a 475 degree dry sterilizer and keeps separate nail file sets for her regular clients in their own Ziplock sandwich bags.

"I think women are always going to want to have their nails, done," says Laub. "I like the indulgence and relaxation.... It probably saves you money at the shrink's office."