

Hair removal

Client health information

There are several ways unwanted hairs are removed in settings such as beauty therapists or hairdressers.

These include:

- Waxing
- Electrolysis
- Lasers
- Plucking and
- Threading

With all of these procedures there is a risk of passing micro-organisms from one client to the next if the procedure is not performed properly. Even though the risks are low, steps can be taken to reduce the risks even further. It is also important that beauty therapists can demonstrate their practices are safe.

If you are concerned about cleanliness and risk of infection you should discuss these processes with your therapist.

What to look for

- Look for a 'certificate of premises registration' from the local council displayed in the shop.
- Look for clean hygienic facilities at premises, such as benches, sinks etc.
- Ask the therapist if they use clean or new equipment each time. If they reuse, how do they sterilise or disinfect their equipment?

Types of hair removal

Waxing

Waxing is supplied in three forms: strip (soft) wax, hot (hard) wax and glucose (water soluble) wax.

Glucose (water soluble) wax is more likely to permit the growth of potentially harmful micro-organisms particularly if the applicator is re-dipped and the wax is continually reheated.

Glucose wax should never be used in beauty establishments.

For 24-48 hours after waxing you should not:

- Swim or have a bath
- Wear tight clothing such as jeans, tights/stockings or leotards, as these may cause excessive perspiration.
- Sunbathe or have a solarium treatment.
- Use a deodorant in the waxed area.

Electrolysis

A fine probe is inserted into each hair follicle followed by the passage of a tiny electric current through the tip of the probe. As the current takes effect, the operator is able to ease the hair from the follicle.

Laser treatment

Laser hair removal works by delivering light at a specified wavelength from a hand-piece into the skin, where it targets dark material (usually the pigment in hair). This is intended to cause thermal and/or mechanical damage to a hair follicle while sparing surrounding tissues.

Plucking

Sometimes tweezers or other instruments are used to pluck the hairs one by one from the area. It is best suited to small areas such as the eyebrows.

Threading

Threading involves using a thread, which is moved quickly over the skin catching the hairs and causing their dislodgement from the follicle.

Operator requirements

Current best practice guidelines recommend the following for those performing hair removal:

- Special care is required when **wax** is used to remove hair from the upper lip, underarm area and pubic area (bikini line). These areas are either moist or close to mucous membrane areas, which are more sensitive and support a higher level of microorganisms. To minimise the risk of transmitting infection, any wax used on

these areas should be discarded and not re-used.

- Wax must not be applied to broken skin or over an area where blood has been drawn.
- If the wax and/or instruments are contaminated with blood or other body fluids, the beauty therapist must immediately discard the infected wax and instruments must be cleaned and sterilised.
- The use of an individual pot of wax for one client, or the use of single-use wooden spatulas, are recommended.
- **Lasers** used in personal care are usually self-contained units with limited equipment requiring cleaning and sterilisation. The end through which the laser beam is released should not come into contact with the client, however it can still become contaminated during use through the dispersal of contaminated tissue. The end pieces of the **laser** arm should be cleaned and sterilised after each client use and stored in a dry place.
- The risk of **electrolysis** is that blood borne viruses and other infections can occur following the removal of hair, if the electrically heated needles become contaminated with blood and are reused on another client. To reduce the risk of transmission of infection it is essential that only sterile, single use needles are used.
- **Plucking** is more likely to cause bleeding than other hair removal processes. Instruments must be cleaned and disinfected after each client. If contaminated with blood or body fluids instruments must be sterilised.
- When undertaking **threading**, threads must be used once only and discarded.

For further information contact your local council health department or the Communicable Disease Control Unit of the Department of Human Services on 1300 651 160.

www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas
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