



The high price of pretty nails

If you've ever spent time in a nail salon, or even walked by, you know there is a distinct pungent smell that comes from the products used by salons. Have you ever wondered, "Just how bad is this stuff if the workers have to wear masks?"

Products used in many nail salons contain a whole host of toxins. From polish and removers to artificial nail products, customers are exposed to hazardous chemicals during their pampering sessions.

Formaldehyde, toluene, dibutyl phthalate, as well as other volatile organic compounds, are just a few of the harmful ingredients found in nail products and have been linked to reproductive harm and different types of cancers. Doctors discourage pregnant women from going to nail salons and even from using harmful nail products during pregnancy because of risk to both mother and baby.

Toluene, a clear colorless liquid used as a solvent, can cause headaches, dizziness and fatigue as well as irritate the eyes, nose and throat. Chronic exposure can be toxic for the kidneys and liver. Toluene can cross over the placenta and expose the fetus as well as be transferred in breast milk.

Formaldehyde has a strong smell and is used as a resin and preservative. This chemical can irritate the eyes, nose and skin and can cause coughing and wheezing, which is dangerous for asthma sufferers. People can be exposed to formaldehyde through skin contact and inhalation.

Dibutyl phthalate (DBP) is a plasticizer and found in a wide variety of consumer products. It is known to cause reproductive and developmental problems, and exposure to DBP can come from inhalation or skin contact, as well as food ingestion.

Acrylic nails contain methyl methacrylate (MMA) and ethyl methacrylate (EMA), which cause respiratory symptoms and is dangerous to people with asthma and allergies.



As of 2006 OPI, the leading brand for nail salons in the U.S., has removed

toluene, DBP and formaldehyde from its nail polish, according to Campaign for Safe Cosmetics (CFC). Orly and Sally Hansen have since followed OPI in making safer products.

So what can you do? Look for products that don't contain hazardous toxins. You can search for these on [Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep database](#). CFC suggests:

1. If you go to a salon, practice BYOP (bring your own polish).
2. Try buffing your nails instead of lacquering.
3. Avoid nail polish and products for pregnant women and children.
4. Skip the mani and get the pedi. Less polish is a good thing.

Always apply and remove polish in a well ventilated area.