10. COSHH

10.1 What is COSHH?

COSHH stands for the 'Control of Substances Hazardous to Health'. In the UK, the law requires all employers to ensure that they are sufficiently controlling harmful substances in the workplace. This means that any dangerous substances need to be identified and precautions should be taken to ensure workers know how to use and handle them safely.

You can prevent or reduce workers exposure to hazardous substances by:

- finding out what the health hazards are;
- deciding how to prevent harm to health (risk assessment);
- providing control measures to reduce harm to health and making sure they are used;
- keeping all control measures in good working order;
- providing information, instruction and training for employees and others;
- providing monitoring and health surveillance in appropriate cases;
- planning for emergencies.

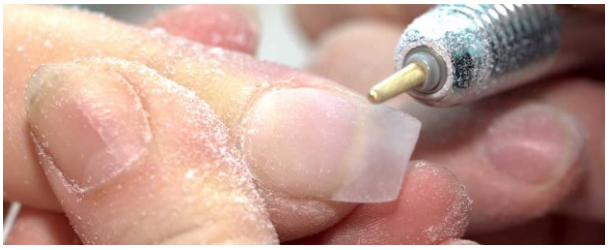
Most businesses use substances, or products that are mixtures of substances. Some processes create substances. These could cause harm to employees, contractors and other people.

10.2 Which substances are hazardous in the salon?

Hazardous substances can take many forms, whether they are liquids, dusts, vapours, gases or fumes, and have the potential to exist in every workplace in the UK. Risk assessments are extremely important to identify which hazardous substances are in your workplace so that you can use them safely.

Hazardous substances are likely to include:

- Bleaches
- Brow and lash tints
- Chemical peels
- Peroxides
- Wax solvents
- Nail enamels and hardeners
- Nail polish removers and solvents
- Nail tips and wraps
- Acrylic and gel nail systems
- Disinfectants
- Cleaning products



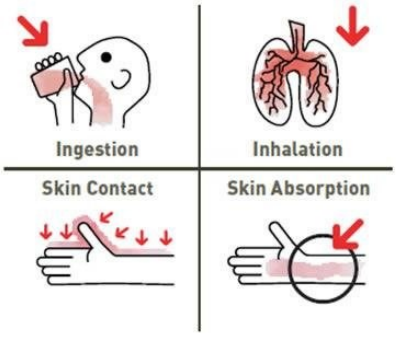
10.3 What effects do hazardous substances have on health?

Hazardous substances can have a variety of ill health effects on those who have exposure to them, some more severe than others. In a beauty salon, the effects are likely to include:

- Skin irritation or dermatitis from direct contact with the substance e.g. solvents in nail varnish removers
- Asthma from exposure to dusts or vapours
- Acrylic fumes can cause headaches, dizziness and nausea
- Contact with blood and tissue residues from piercing or tattooing can cause infection

The main routes of entry for hazardous substances are:

- **Inhalation** – e.g. dust filings, liquids and powders in acrylic systems for artificial nails
- **Skin absorption** – for example, from wearing contaminated gloves.
- **Direct contact** – for example, splashes or vapours in the eyes or on the skin.
- **Ingestion** – for example, swallowing chemicals or eating contaminated food.



10.4 Chemical labels

The manufacturer has a legal requirement to ensure that any chemicals that is dangerous to your health is labelled with appropriate hazard symbols, warnings, health and safety advice and any personal protective equipment (PPE) that must be worn when handling it.

As of June 2015, the warning symbols are red and white (as opposed to the previous orange and black labels).

You must ensure that you always check whether the warning label on a product says 'may cause sensitisation by skin contact' or 'can cause allergic reactions' so that you can put precautions in place.

10.5 Cleaning a beauty salon safely

All equipment and surfaces need to be cleaned and disinfected regularly to help maintain them and to help prevent the spread of infection through contamination. Unsafe or unhygienic practices can affect the health of both the customer and the worker.

However, cleaning chemicals are also a hazardous substance and need to be used with care in order to promote health and safety in your beauty salon. You should:

- Keep the work area clean and tidy.
- Towels need to be washed properly and cleaned between uses.
- Clean up spills straight away (clean-as-you-go).
- Wash out all equipment after use and dispose of any waste safely.
- Thoroughly clean all equipment at the end of each day.
- Make up only as much solution as you will need for immediate use.
- For equipment that comes into contact with skin, clean it before and after each use.

To clean equipment, use hot soapy water before disinfecting or sterilising it so as to remove any residue that may prevent the disinfectant from working. A fresh disinfection solution should be prepared each day and the container should be thoroughly cleaned before refilling.

You should prepare a schedule of daily, weekly, and monthly tasks and assign them as duties. As part of the schedule it's useful to note the right cleaning products and the appropriate PPE to wear for each task.

10.6 Controlling dermatitis

Dermatitis is a type of eczema that occurs when your skin comes into direct contact with an irritant. The irritant damages the outer layer of the skin, causing redness, itching, burning or stinging and can lead to your skin becoming blistered, dry and cracked.

Skin damage like this is unsightly, unpleasant and unprofessional looking but it can be prevented.

10.7 What causes dermatitis in a beauty salon?

Dermatitis can affect all parts of the body but most commonly it just affects the hands. People that work with irritants in their job, or those whose work involves a lot of water, are more at risk of suffering from dermatitis than others – which is why hairdressers need to be extra careful.

In a beauty salon, dermatitis is likely to be caused by:

- Frequent contact with water.
- Contact with the chemicals in products
- Chemicals used in some rubber gloves
- Acrylate used for artificial nails
- Depilatory waxes. Those allergic to sticking plasters may also be allergic to depilatory waxes.
- Contact with cleaning chemicals or detergents.

If your work involves a lot of contact with water, then you are more at risk of developing dermatitis.

There are many ways in which your hands may come into contact with water and chemical products.

For example:

- Tinting with bare hands.
- Use of massage oils.
- Handling equipment left to soak in cleaning chemicals.
- Touching contaminated surfaces or clothing.
- Splashing chemicals on to your skin when mixing or handling them.
- Aerosols, such as hairspray, settling on your skin.

10.8 How to prevent dermatitis in a beauty salon

Although dermatitis is an unpleasant condition to have, the good news is that it's easily preventable. There are a few simple things you can do to help prevent dermatitis:

- Wear disposable, non-latex gloves for tinting, waxing etc.
- Dry your hands thoroughly with a disposable paper towel.
- Moisturise your hands as often as possible with fragrance-free moisturiser. Make sure that you moisturise all of your hands, wrists and fingers.
- Wear a new pair of gloves for every customer.
- Check your skin regularly for early signs of skin problems.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recommends that skin creams are paraffin-based or aqueous moisturising creams. These should be in a form that can be used without cross-contamination between users – so ensure each worker has their own supply. Skin creams are important as they help to remove contamination from the skin and replace lost oils.

10.9 Checking for dermatitis

You should check your skin for signs of damage every day – look out for areas of soreness, redness or dryness on your hands, wrists and arms. Encourage everyone to do this regularly.

10.10 PPE for beauticians

Personal Protective Equipment in a beauty salon is always recommended as a health and safety measure.

Beauty therapists should wear gloves when:

- Mixing and applying tints
- Using chemicals for artificial nails
- Handling wax
- Applying eyelash perms
- Cleaning the salon, beds and equipment

The HSE recommends that the gloves you use at work are: single use, all-round smooth, powder-free, non-latex gloves, ideally around 300mm length (top to tail). These are available in different sizes and it is important to use the size that fits properly. Choose long-length gloves with folded cuffs to prevent water running down your arm where possible.

You should throw away single-use gloves every time they are taken off – instil a 'new customer new gloves' mantra in the workplace to make sure people comply with this. This is important because the gloves will be contaminated with products and water and may cause dermatitis if re-used. Change gloves hourly if still with the same client, this will help to prevent sweating which may also irritate the skin.

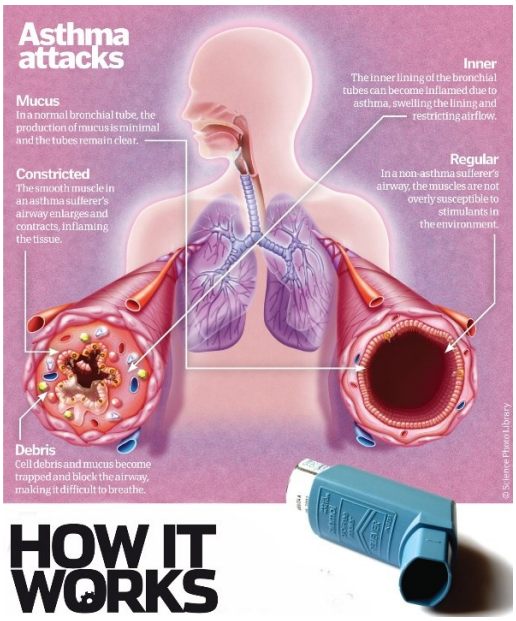
Important tips

- Limit the number of times hands are washed and dried during the day if possible and don't forget to dry in between the fingers.
- Take rings off so chemicals, detergents or water don't get trapped underneath and cause irritation.
- When wearing gloves for a long period of time, cotton gloves can be worn underneath to minimise sweating.
- Remember, clients may be allergic to latex gloves. Always check with clients if they have allergies.

10.11 Asthma

When you come into contact with something that irritates your lungs, known as a trigger or respiratory sensitiser, your airways become narrow, tight and inflamed. This sensation is known as asthma and can lead to difficulty breathing, wheezing and coughing and a tight chest. Asthma can be brought on by certain work activities, including those involved in beauty therapy. Things in a beauty salon likely to cause asthma include:

- Dust from nails and latex
- Cleaning chemicals
- Fumes from solvents and cleaners
- Henna products



10.12 How to prevent asthma in a beauty salon

Preventing asthma from developing or worsening whilst in the salon is a necessary step to take.

Tips include:

- Keep the workplace well ventilated. Have an open door or window where possible to get clean air flowing through
- Avoid using dusty products, choose pastes or solutions instead
- Wear a face mask when doing nails
- Have a dust extractor and ensure it is switched on when working

Some types of beauty products are known to cause problems and so may be labelled 'may cause sensitisation by inhalation' or 'can cause allergic reactions'. Check the label of any product that you use to decide upon the necessary precautions.

10.13 How are beauty products involved?

Beauty products supplied to the salon must comply with the UK and EU Cosmetics Regulation and its amendments. The purpose of the Regulation is to ensure products are safe when used correctly. The Regulation details how certain ingredients, such as tinted bases, nail care and make-up can be used. It may require information to be given in an instruction leaflet or on the label, indicating the presence of certain ingredients or how to use products containing them.

The Cosmetics Regulation requires cosmetic products to be labelled with a list of all the ingredients they contain. There are no exceptions from this requirement. Even beauty products used in professional salons, and free samples, must be labelled with an ingredient list. The ingredient list is to allow people who have been diagnosed as allergic to an ingredient to avoid a product containing that ingredient.

Some chemicals used by beauty therapists may need to have a safety data sheet (SDS) under the UK and EU REACH Regulation (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals).

The Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations, usually referred to as CHIP, no longer covers the requirements for safety data sheets. A safety data sheet is only required when a substance or mixture is classified as hazardous under the CLP Regulation (Classification, Labelling and Packaging of Substances and Mixtures).

Finished cosmetic products, including salon products, are exempt under REACH from the need to provide safety data sheets.

Providing products and chemicals are used in accordance with manufacturers' instructions, the risk from beauty products should be low, making any COSHH assessment a relatively simple and straightforward process.

10.14 Allergy testing

You must carry out allergy alert tests at least 48 hours before applying eyebrow/eyelash tints.

If your client suffers any reaction at all, don't go ahead with the appointment. Keep confidential records of the allergy alert tests and outcomes. Staff should also be tested for allergies. Again, keep confidential records of the results and any action taken.

When storing confidential client or staff information you will need to comply with GDPR, including getting client consent for collecting and keeping health-related information such as client consultation forms.

Don't forget: permanent hair colour must not be applied to anyone under 16, or used by any employees under the age of 16. You must not carry out an allergy test on anyone under the age of 16.

10.15 Age restrictions on treatments

Under-16s and vulnerable adults

Carrying out beauty treatments on under-16s is not recommended.

Beauty therapists must protect and promote the welfare of under-16s and vulnerable adults. You must ensure treatments are safe and appropriate and that the individual wants to have the treatment or treatments. You should always follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines.

You must ensure you have written permission from a parent or legal guardian before going ahead with the following treatments:

- Earlobe piercing
- Waxing (not intimate waxing)
- Facials
- Manicures
- Pedicures

A parent or responsible adult must be present during treatments provided to under-16s.

Under-18s

The following treatments and services should not be given to anyone under the age of 18 or provided by a therapist under the age of 18:

- Botox, dermal fillers or similar anti-wrinkle treatments
- UV therapy
- Intimate waxing
- IPL (intense pulsed light) treatments
- Micropigmentation
- Microblading

10.16 Carry out an assessment

To make an assessment, questions should be asked, such as:

- What products are used?
- What is the potential of a product causing harm? (i.e. the hazard)
- What is the chance of exposure occurring?
- How much are people exposed, for how long and how often? (i.e. the risk)
- Can the exposure be prevented? If not, how is it adequately controlled?

To answer these questions, always look at the products being used and read the instructions and warnings provided on the products and packaging.

It is good practice to keep a written record of the assessment. This will help you if you are asked about health and safety in your salon.

10.17 Control exposure

Some of the means of controlling exposures are:

- Determine which products contain hazardous chemicals or ingredients and label them properly.
- Use a less harmful product where possible.
- Read manufacturer's instructions on how to use products safely, including hair products, cleaners, etc.
- Avoid contact with products that contain known cancer-causing ingredients
- Train workers in safe handling of hazardous products.
- Safely store and dispose of products.
- Provide local exhaust ventilation where there is a risk of exposure to hazardous fumes.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) e.g. gloves and aprons

The use of PPE cannot be used as an alternative to control measures. It should only be considered when prevention or adequate control prove impracticable, and then used in addition to other control measures.

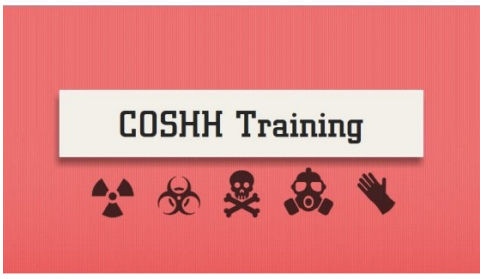
For many chemicals that can be inhaled the authorities have set safe levels that can be breathed in during a working day; these are called Workplace Exposure Limits (WELs). Only a small number of these chemicals are used in beauty products and beauty product manufacturers' data indicate the levels used in salons should be well within the safe limits set. However, exposure should still be kept to a minimum which may be achieved through good ventilation of the salon.

10.18 Ensure that employees are properly informed, trained and supervised

COSHH requires you to provide your employees with suitable information, instruction and training about:

- The nature of the substances they work with or are exposed to and the risks created by the exposure to those substances.
- The precautions they should take.

You should give them sufficient information and instructions on:

- Control measures, their purpose and how to use them
- How to use personal protective equipment and clothing provided
- Results of any exposure monitoring and health surveillance (without giving people's names)
- Emergency procedures

This last step is vital. You must ensure that your employees understand the risks from the hazardous substances they could be exposed to. Your control measures won't be fully effective if your employees do not know how to use them properly, or the importance of reporting faults.