



Board of Barbering & Cosmetology

Whirlpool Footspa Safety Fact Sheet

May 2002

CONSUMER INFORMATION SHEET

Skin Infection & Whirlpool Footbath FAQs:

What happened?

- In October 2000, health officials received complaints about a large outbreak of skin boils. It was determined that the boils were caused by contaminated whirlpool footbaths used at a single nail salon in Santa Cruz County. When the customers soaked their feet in the footbaths as part of pedicure procedures, some became infected. Because these footbaths had not been properly cleaned, hair and skin debris build-up behind a screen in the tub basin allowed bacteria to grow to unusually high levels.

What do these skin infections look like?

- These skin boils usually start out looking like a spider bite that gradually grows in size and eventually produces pus. Boils sometimes become open wounds and may leave scars.

What causes these infections?

- These infections are caused *Mycobacterium fortuitum* and other related *mycobacteria*. We come into contact with this type of bacteria everyday because it is normally found in water and soil.

How common are these types of skin infections?

- Such infections are relatively rare. If salon whirlpool footbaths are cleaned and disinfected properly, and in accordance with new regulations adopted by the Board of Barbering & Cosmetology, the risk of these infections is very small.

How are these infections treated?

- These types of infections can be treated with antibiotics. In some cases, these boils will heal without treatment.

Skin Infection & Whirlpool Footbath FAQs:

What should I do if I have a skin infection that may be from a salon whirlpool footbath?

- Go to your doctor. Tell him or her you have had your legs in a whirlpool footbath. The doctor can take a small biopsy of a boil for mycobacterial culture. Also, please call the Board of Barbering and Cosmetology (1-800-952-5210) to report any problems you believe are the result of your salon. You can also file a complaint via our Web site: www.dca.ca.gov/barber.

What can I do to protect myself before I get a treatment in a whirlpool footbath?

- First, check out the salon. Make sure its Board of Barbering & Cosmetology license is posted in plain view in the reception area and is current;
- Make sure the operator's license is posted at his or her work station;
- Make sure the Board's Health and Safety poster is displayed in the reception area;
- Look around to see if the salon is clean, free of trash, and set up with clean, sanitized instruments;
- Don't be afraid to ask the operator how the footspas are cleaned. If they hesitate or won't answer you, that could be a sign you may want to take your business elsewhere.
- If you have any doubts about the cleanliness standards at a salon, leave.

Has the Board of Barbering & Cosmetology put new regulations in place?

- Yes, in Spring 2001, the Board adopted new regulations *requiring* that salons follow specific disinfection procedures to ensure that their footspa equipment is properly cleaned and maintained. Those procedures guide the salon staff on how footspas must be cleaned:
 - Between each pedicure customer, the water must be drained and the footspa must be cleaned with soap and water, and disinfected with approved disinfectant;
 - At the end of each business day, the footspa screen and any debris must be removed. The basin must be cleaned with soap and water. The screen must be cleaned with an approved solution or disinfectant, and the system must be flushed with soap and water for at least 10 minutes.
 - Every other week, the footspa system must be cleaned with a bleach solution, then the basin must be soaked in the solution for at least six hours.