



PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR HAIRDRESSERS AND BARBERS

2025



Acknowledgements

This document has been developed based on similar guidance provided by Australian states – particularly drawing on material developed by the Departments of Health in Victoria and Western Australia.

Comments

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Version

Citation: Ministry of Health. 2025. *Public Health Guidance for Hairdressers and Barbers*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Published in July 2025 by the Ministry of Health PO Box 5013, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

ISBN 978-1-991324-40-5 (online) HP 9134



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How to use this guidance

Who does this guidance apply to?

This guidance can be used by all hairdressing and barbering services provided in New Zealand – including but not limited to 'brick and mortar' hair salons and barbershops, mobile services, home-based services, and itinerant services (eg, fairs, rest homes, inhome services).

While the guidance refers to 'business owners', this term applies both to owners and operators of hair salons and barbershops, and to training providers.

What does this guidance cover?

This guidance covers public health risks only.

Hairdressers and barbers need to meet the following regulatory requirements.

- Work health and safety as determined by the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 and its regulations
 - WorkSafe New Zealand (WorkSafe) is the regulator and has guidance for hairdressers and stylists on its website.¹
- Hazardous substances requirements
 - The Environmental Protection Authority regulates hazardous substances under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 and is responsible for approving and classifying hazardous substances, and setting requirements for labels and packaging, including under the Cosmetic Products Group Standard.
 - WorkSafe is the regulator for the work-related use, handling, manufacture and storage of hazardous substances under the Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations 2017.
- Backflow prevention valves
 - Check requirements with your local authority.

¹ WorkSafe New Zealand. (nd). What Risk Looks Like in Your Industry – Hairdressing. URL: worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/managing-risks/what-risk-looks-like-in-yourindustry/hairdressing (accessed 9 July 2025).



Part A: Premises and equipment

Water and plumbing

- Have separate sinks with hot and cold running water for:
 - hair washing
 - equipment cleaning
 - handwashing with soap and single-use towels (paper or single-use cloth) or hand dryer.
- Check with your local authority's building department regarding backflow devices or any other building requirements needed.

Razors

Razors can come into contact with small cuts or broken skin during services.

Appropriate razor selection and handling are important to prevent the spread of blood-borne viruses and infections between clients.

Cut-throat razors

- Traditional cut-throat razors with permanent blades should not be used in hairdressing and barbering. This is because they cannot be properly cleaned between clients, which risks the spread of infectious diseases, including bloodborne viruses.
- Cut-throat razors with disposable blades can be used safely provided:
 - a new blade is used for each client
 - used blades are disposed of appropriately in a secure tamper-proof sharps container
 - the handle is thoroughly cleaned and dried between each use
 - if the handle is contaminated with blood, it is rinsed well with water and soaked in a disinfectant solution.

Disposable razors

- After using a disposable razor, place it in a secure, tamper-proof sharps container.
- Never reuse disposable razors.



Disposal of sharps

Sharps such as razors and blades must never be placed in general waste receptacles.

- Sharp tools can cause injuries that might expose workers to blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.
- Sharp tools used by hairdressers and barbers include (but are not limited to):
 - razors
 - blades.
- Staff should ensure that disposable sharp tools are safely managed and immediately disposed of after use in a secure tamper-proof sharps container.
- Replace sharps containers when three-quarters full check with your local authority as some will have a list of licensed collectors.

Ventilation

Why is this important?

When ventilation is insufficient, airborne chemicals, dust, and infectious respiratory particles can accumulate in the air and be inhaled causing illness or respiratory issues. Products that release formaldehyde should be used with caution.^{2,3}

- Ensure that there is sufficient ventilation, particularly in areas where chemicals are mixed and applied.
- If natural ventilation is insufficient (eg, opening doors and windows) or impractical, consider using mechanical ventilation (eg, air purifier or ducted mechanical ventilation system [HVAC]).⁴

Dogs

- Disability assist dogs have a right to access public places and private businesses in New Zealand.⁵
- For all other dogs, business owners can make their own decisions about whether to allow them on the premises subject to any requirements in contracts (such as lease and/or franchise agreements).

⁵ Te Kāhui Tika Tangata | Human Rights Commission. 2023. Disability Assist Dogs and Rights of Access. URL: tikatangata.org.nz/resources-and-support/guidelines/disability-assist-dogs-and-rights-ofaccess (accessed 9 July 2025).



² US Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (nd). *Hair Salons: Facts about formaldehyde in hair products*. URL: **osha.gov/hair-salons** (accessed 9 July 2025).

³ NSW Government. 2014. Potential Exposure to Formaldehyde whilst Using Keratin Treatments Safety Alert. URL: safework.nsw.gov.au/safety-alerts/safety-alerts/potential-exposure-to-formaldehydewhilst-using-keratin-treatments (accessed 9 July 2025).

⁴ Health New Zealand - Te Whatu Ora. (nd). *Ventilation*. URL: **info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/healthyhomes-environments/ventilation** (accessed 9 July 2025).

Part B: People

Hand hygiene

Why is this important?

Hand hygiene is considered one of the most important and effective ways to reduce the spread of infection. Proper hand hygiene reduces microorganisms on hands, particularly transient flora (bacteria and viruses acquired during contact with clients, contaminated equipment, or contaminated surfaces in the work environment).

When should hand hygiene be performed?

- before and after contact with each client
- after exposure to blood or bodily fluids/substances
- after handling used instruments, laundry or waste
- before and after eating
- after using the toilet
- after smoking or vaping
- before putting on and after removing gloves
- when hands become visibly contaminated

Use soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs if your hands are not visibly soiled. For more information see:

healthify.nz/hauora-wellbeing/h/hand-washing

Handling sharp instruments

Why is this important?

Sharp tools, including razor blades and scissors, require careful handling to prevent injuries and potential infections.

Safe handling practices

- Treat all sharps as contaminated unless they are known to be sterile.
- Always handle sharp instruments carefully to avoid injuries.

- Dispose of sharps, including razor blades, immediately after use into a designated secure tamper-proof sharps container.
- Keep sharps containers close to work areas.
- Replace sharps containers when three-quarters full.
- Never reach into sharps containers.

Handling cuts, abrasions and infections

Why is this important?

Intact skin forms a natural defence against infection. Cuts and breaks in the skin, or skin lesions, are potential entry points for infection.

For workers in hairdressing salons or barbershops

- Cover cuts, abrasions or wounds with waterproof dressings.
- Change dressings if they become soiled or wet.
- If cuts, abrasions or wounds are on hands, wear single-use gloves during all procedures.
- You should not provide services to clients if you have:
 - extensive broken skin that cannot be effectively covered
 - nail infections or fungal diseases.

For clients

If a client has an open cut, abrasion or wound on their head, neck or face:

- only provide services if:
 - you believe you can appropriately work around the condition
 - you have processes in place to prevent transmission to other clients
- take extra precautions with the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and infection control measures
- clean, disinfect and dry all equipment thoroughly after use.

Handling head lice

- Business owners should develop their own policies and procedures for managing a client who has head lice.
- Staff should be aware of head lice and know how to manage them based on the policies and procedures.



Managing head lice⁶

Here are some steps you can take to prevent spreading lice.

- Keep all cut hair inside the cape. When finished, fold the cape inward, roll it up to trap any lice, and carry it to the cleaning area. Throw the hair away in a plastic-lined rubbish bin.
- Promptly sweep up all loose hair, put it in a rubbish bag, secure the opening to the rubbish bag and then place that bag into a plastic-lined rubbish bin.
- Wash capes normally in your washing machine.
- Clean all tools used on the client.
 - Soak brushes, scissors and combs in hot water to disinfect them.
 - Kill lice on combs and tools by placing items in a suitable container and pouring hot (recently boiled) water on them.
 - Leave to soak for 5–10 minutes.
 - Wash towels and fabric items on a hot wash cycle with detergent.
- Wash your hands after touching the client and again after cleaning the equipment.

⁶ This section is based on guidance provided by the Department of Health in Western Australia: Government of Western Australia, Department of Health. 2024. *Guideline for the Management of Public Health Risks Associated with the Hairdressing and Barber Industry*. URL: health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Hairdressers-and-barbers (accessed 9 July 2025).

Part C: Processes for cleaning and disinfecting

Why is this important?

- The processes of cleaning and disinfecting re-useable equipment appropriately, so that it is safe for the next client, is important to reduce the risk of transmitting pathogens either to yourself, to your client or to other staff members. Appropriate reprocessing for some items may simply require cleaning; others may additionally require disinfecting.
- If appropriate reprocessing procedures are not followed, hairdressers and barbers risk infecting their clients with one or more of the following:
 - blood-borne viruses (hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV)
 - bacterial infections
 - other viral infections such as herpes simplex
 - fungal infections
 - head lice.



To keep your clients and colleagues safe, always:

- treat all blood and bodily fluids as if they contain pathogens (ie, disease-causing microorganisms)
- follow safety steps to prevent spreading disease.

What is the difference between cleaning and disinfecting?

- **Cleaning** is taking off materials (like dirt, debris, excess hair products and bodily fluids) to the level needed for further processing or reuse.
- **Disinfection** is a process that kills most microorganisms (but not bacterial spores) so an item is safe to reuse.

What is the recommended process for cleaning and decontamination?

- The level of cleaning and decontamination depends on the use of the item. In general, the tools used by hairdressers and barbers are considered to be 'non-critical items'⁷ as they come in contact with intact skin.
- Whether and how a tool needs to be cleaned, or cleaned and disinfected, will depend on what the tool is and what it has been exposed to.
- If a tool you are using comes into contact with mucous membranes (eg, inside of nose) or non-intact skin (ie, skin that is cut or damaged in some way, and/or blood), then it needs to be either a single-use item or be cleaned and disinfected between use.

Recommended processes for cleaning tools between clients

- This section outlines the processes or actions that are recommended to clean and disinfect tools and equipment before being used on a new client.
- Always buy instruments and equipment that can be properly cleaned and disinfected. Make sure you are provided with the cleaning instructions where appropriate.
- Check the manufacturer's instructions for methods of maintenance and cleaning.
- At the end of each day, tools should be cleaned as described in Tables 1–5 below, dried, then placed in a closed container.

⁷ Under the Spaulding classification scheme, 'critical items' are those that enter sterile tissue or vascular tissue and must be sterile as they have a high risk of infection if contaminated with a microorganism, 'semi-critical items' are those that contact mucous membranes or non-intact skin and require cleaning and high-level disinfection, and 'non-critical items' are those that come into contact with intact skin only. For further details see:

Rutala WA, Weber DJ. 2019. Guideline for disinfection and sterilization of prion-contaminated medical instruments. *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology*, *31*(2), 107–117. doi.org/10.1086/650197

The material in Tables 1–5 is based on similar guidance produced in Australian states (Victoria⁸, Western Australia⁹).

Equipment	Potential risk	When	Recommended process
Disposable single-use razors (for shaving or cutting/razoring hair)	Skin infections or blood-borne virus transmission	After each client	 Sterile, single-use razors are recommended for shaving. Dispose into a sharps container after use. Not for reuse.
Disposable razor blades (safety-type razor with reusable handle)	Skin infections or blood-borne virus transmission	After each client	 Blade: Dispose of blade into sharps container after use. Handle: EITHER: Wash in warm water and detergent. Rinse in hot running water. Dry with a lint-free cloth. OR: Remove hair and debris. Wipe down with damp cloth. Wipe down with 70% alcohol wipes.
Straight blade (cut- throat) razor	Skin infections or blood-borne virus transmission	After each client	 Disposable blade: Dispose of blade into a secure tamper-proof sharps container. Handle: Wash in warm water and detergent. Rinse in hot running water. Dry with a lint-free cloth. All-in-one blade and handle: Wash in warm water and detergent. Rinse in hot running water. Dry with a lint-free cloth. All-in-one blade and handle: Wash in warm water and detergent.

⁸ Department of Health and Human Services. 2019. Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines for Hair, Beauty, Tattooing and Skin Penetration Industries. URL: health.vic.gov.au/publications/infectionprevention-and-control-guidelines-for-hair-beauty-tattooing-and-skin (accessed 9 July 2025).

⁹ Government of Western Australia, Department of Health. 2024. Guideline for the Management of Public Health Risks Associated with the Hairdressing and Barber Industry. URL: health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Hairdressers-and-barbers (accessed 9 July 2025).



Equipment	Potential risk	When	Recommended process
Electric razors	Skin infections or blood-borne virus transmission	After each client	 Electric razors should not be used because they: can cause micro-abrasions that can allow viruses and bacteria to cause infection are not able to be effectively cleaned and disinfected between clients if blades are unable to be removed from the unit. Note: Trimmers may be used
			(see next section).

Table 2: Recommended processes for cleaning tools between clients: Hair-cuttingrelated equipment

Equipment	Potential risk	When	Recommended process
Scissors	Skin infections or blood-borne virus transmission	After each client	 EITHER: Use a lint-free cloth to remove hair. Wash in warm water and detergent. Rinse in hot running water. Dry with a lint-free cloth. OR: Remove hair and debris. Wipe down with damp cloth. Wipe down with 70% alcohol wipes.
Electric clippers and trimmers	Skin infections or blood-borne virus transmission	After each client	 Detachable blades on clippers must be cleaned before being reused. EITHER: Use a lint-free cloth to remove hair. Wash in warm water and detergent. Rinse in hot running water. Dry with a lint-free cloth. OR: Remove hair and debris. Wipe down with damp cloth. Wipe down with 70% alcohol wipes. Electric clippers handpiece: Wipe over with cloth dampened with warm water and detergent. Rinse by wiping with cloth dampened in hot water. Dry thoroughly.

Equipment	Potential risk	When	Recommended process
			Note: This is different to the recommended approach for handles of cut-throat blades, as clipper handpieces are unlikely to be able to be immersed under water (due to electrical components).

Table 3: Recommended processes for cleaning tools between clients: Hair-colouring equipment

Equipment	Potential risk	When	Recommended process
Colour mixing bowlsColour brushesColour applicators	Chemical contamination	After each client	 Rinse free of colour. Wash in warm water and detergent. Rinse in hot running water. Dry with a lint-free cloth.

Table 4: Recommended processes for cleaning tools between clients: Linen

Equipment	Potential risk	When	Recommended process
 Capes or gowns Towels Hair covers or wraps 	Infection or infestation (eg, head lice)	After each client (unless a clean towel or paper tape is used around the neck)	 Wash in hot water cycle with detergent. Dry as required according to material type (clothes dryer on hot setting or air dry).

Table 5: Recommended processes for cleaning tools between clients: Other equipment

Equipment	Potential risk	When	Recommended process
Shaving brushes	Skin infections	After each client	 Rinse free of hair and shaving cream. Wash in warm water and detergent. Rinse in hot running water. Dry thoroughly.
 Combs Neck brushes Rollers and rods Hair pins or section clips 	Infection or infestation (eg, head lice)	After each client	 Use a lint-free cloth to remove hair. Remove hair from brushes and combs. Wash in warm water and detergent.



Equipment	Potential risk	When	Recommended process
			Rinse in hot running water.
			• Dry with a lint-free cloth.

Recommended processes for cleaning after clients or staff have been cut, or exposed to blood or other bodily fluids

Why is this important?

Blood and bodily fluid spills need to be cleaned promptly to reduce the potential for contact with other clients, staff or others present.

Hairdressing and barbering businesses should:

- have procedures in place for managing situations where a client's skin is accidentally cut and bleeding occurs (eg, from scissors or a razor)
- ensure this includes appropriate processes to clean equipment, tools and surfaces that have been exposed to blood or bodily fluids
- ensure all staff are trained and prepared to respond appropriately.



Step 1: Assisting a client who has been cut, and cleaning the immediate area¹⁰

- 1. Wash your hands as described in the hand hygiene section. Dry hands.
- 2. Put on gloves.
- 3. Gather the following materials:
 - a. a clean tissue for applying pressure
 - b. dressing for the client
 - c. two plastic bags (place one inside the other).
- 4. Attend to the client by applying pressure to the cut with a clean tissue. Once the bleeding is contained, apply a clean dressing to cover it.
- 5. Dispose of contaminated equipment appropriately.
 - a. Single-use equipment: Dispose of contaminated single-use equipment into a tamper-free sharps container.
 - b. Re-useable equipment: Store contaminated re-useable equipment in a smooth-surfaced, impervious container until it can be cleaned and disinfected as described in Step 2 below. Avoid letting the blood dry on the equipment.
- 6. Clean blood spills or spots or drops of blood from surfaces, equipment or the floor following the steps below:
 - a. Wipe the area with a paper towel to remove blood. Avoid smearing over surfaces.
 - b. Clean the area as soon as possible using detergent and lukewarm water.
 - c. In situations where cleaning is difficult (such as between tiles) and there is a possibility of bare skin contact with that surface, disinfect (eg, using bleach) after the initial clean-up with detergent and water.
- 7. Place any bloodied materials in the plastic bags.
- 8. Remove gloves.
- 9. Put the gloves into the plastic bags, tie/close bags and discard into domestic waste.
- 10. Wash hands using soap and running water.

¹⁰ This section is based on guidance provided in Western Australia: Government of Western Australia, Department of Health. 2024. Guideline for the Management of Public Health Risks Associated with the Hairdressing and Barber Industry. URL: health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Hairdressers-and-barbers (accessed 9 July 2025).



Step 2: Cleaning and disinfecting tools and equipment that have been exposed to blood or bodily fluids¹¹

Instruments that do not come into contact with blood or bodily fluids do not need to be disinfected. However, if such instruments (eg, scissors) accidentally pierce, nick or cut the skin, they must be disinfected before being used on another client.

Plastic items that have been exposed to significant amounts of blood or bodily fluids should be discarded. If plastic items are exposed to small amounts of blood, they can be disinfected using the method described below.

The suggested process to disinfect tools and equipment that have been exposed to blood or other bodily fluids is as follows.

Step 1: Clean

- 1. Remove hair and debris.
- 2. Thoroughly clean equipment using detergent and warm water.
- 3. Dry the equipment.

Step 2: Disinfect

EITHER option A: Immersion in chemicals

- 4. Check the use-by date on the label before using disinfectants and discard any products that are out of date.
- 5. If the disinfectant needs to be diluted, then follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- 6. Disinfect the equipment by immersing the item in either:
 - a. 70% alcohol solution
 - b. disinfectant (eg, as commonly used in 'sterilising jars'), or
 - c. 0.5% bleach (5 ml of household bleach added to 1 litre (4 cups) of water).
- 7. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for:
 - a. the soak or contact times the equipment must be in the solution
 - b. any requirement to rinse the product after disinfecting.
- 8. Disinfectants must be:
 - a. labelled appropriately with the name, date and dilution strength

¹¹ This section is based on guidance provided in Western Australia: Government of Western Australia, Department of Health. 2024. *Guideline for the Management of Public Health Risks Associated with the Hairdressing and Barber Industry*. URL: health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Hairdressers-and-barbers (accessed 9 July 2025).

b. used and stored according to the manufacturer's instructions.

OR option B: Radiation (ultraviolet light-C or UVC)

UVC provides high-level disinfection to surfaces it comes in contact with. It has low penetration and is absorbed by glass, plastics and metals. It cannot 'go around corners' or disinfect areas not directly exposed to UVC.

- 9. Follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding:
 - a. operating, including exposure time to UVC
 - b. servicing.



Useful links

Health New Zealand

Contact public health services tewhatuora.govt.nz/health-services-and-programmes/national-public-healthservice/contact-public-health-services

Ministry of Health

Guidelines for the safe piercing of skin health.govt.nz/publications/guidelines-for-the-safe-piercing-of-skin

WorkSafe New Zealand

General requirements for workplaces worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/businesses/general-requirementsfor-workplaces

How to manage work risks worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/businesses/general-requirementsfor-workplaces

Understanding the law: Primary duty of care worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/getting-started/understandingthe-law/primary-duty-of-care

Personal protective equipment (PPE) – a guide for businesses worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/personal-protective-equipmentppe/personal-protective-equipment-a-guide-for-businesses

What risk looks like in your industry: Hairdressing worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/personal-protective-equipmentppe/personal-protective-equipment-a-guide-for-businesses

Contact dermatitis worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/contact-dermatitis

How and when to notify WorkSafe New Zealand: Notifications **worksafe.govt.nz/notifications**



Environmental Protection Authority

Cosmetics Products Group Standard (includes hair dye) epa.govt.nz/hazardous-substances/rules-notices-and-how-to-comply/specificsubstance-guidance/cosmetics

Healthline

Emergency Services 111

National Poisons Centre 0800 POISON 0800 764 766

Healthline 0800 611 116

