



Clean Feet

By Jeannie Boniface

Footbath cleaning – controversy and solution

The media (CNN, 20/20, Citytv) have been covering the cleaning and disinfecting of pedicure footbaths in the spa industry since 1998. They continue to bring the issue to the forefront year after year – as they should.

Killer beauty

In September of 2000, 110 women contracted a bacterial infection from the footbaths of one spa. The infection left their legs permanently scarred for life. You never hear of a death from a bad haircut, but there have been two deaths this year from improper cleaning of pedicure equipment – one in Texas, the other in Toronto.

What can you do about it? In this article, you can learn how to clean and disinfect the way medical professionals do. Gone are the days of using household cleaners to “disinfect” equipment contaminated with tinea pedis (athlete’s foot), CA-MRSA (community acquired methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) and *Mycobacterium fortuitum* (a bacteria). No more free-pouring bleach and assuming you are disinfecting. It’s time to have proper infection-control protocols in place using thorough cleaning methods, followed by disinfecting with government-registered disinfectants.

No matter the bath

If you have a footbath with jets, there are special considerations to keep in mind for cleaning. The jets are home for bacteria. Biofilms form if the jets are not cleaned properly. Once formed, they cannot be removed by most cleaning products. Special products formulated to remove biofilm are required to get rid of the buildup in your jets. Once the biofilm is removed and the bath has been thoroughly cleaned, then use your registered disinfectant on the surfaces and in the pipes. Remember to wait the specified contact time. Also, be sure to clean and disinfect behind the filters – bacteria can live in the tiniest of openings.

If you have a pipeless footbath, you still have to clean and disinfect all surfaces. The covering over the propellers usually pop off. Remove the coverings. Clean, then disinfect the footbath surface, the propellers and the covers of the propellers.

Simple footbaths with no jets and no propellers are the easiest to maintain. Stainless steel footbaths and plastic footbaths can easily be cleaned with a good scrubbing action, then disinfected. Disposable liners are an excellent method of avoiding cross-contamination between clients. However, you should still clean and disinfect the footbath, in case the liner has a small crack.

Two steps to safety

All of the above procedures will sound familiar if you read my first Esthemag Pro article (May/June 06, p. 24) – cleaning and disinfecting is always a two-step process. You thoroughly clean all surfaces, then you disinfect. Discuss protocols for cleaning the footbaths with your staff so that everyone understands your spa policies. If you would like more information on setting up protocols for your footbath cleaning, contact your infection control supplier, call your regional public health department or contact me (see Experts, p. 48).

Your clients watch the news. If you have a proper cleaning and disinfecting protocol in place, you can ease their fears when they ask you how you clean your footbath equipment. Give clients a safe pedicure environment, and they’ll recommend your spa to their friends. Your good reputation will blossom and your business will grow! ✨

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