



Photograph by: Troy Fleece, Leader Post

Do homework before hitting spa

Experts urge safety standards – Irene Seiberling – Leader Post

Canada's spa industry has evolved into a billion-dollar revenue generator. With a booming provincial economy, Saskatchewan spas are among those cashing in on the growing popularity nationally of businesses offering esthetic, wellness and medical services.

With more and more people going for spa treatments, and more and more spas opening to meet the increasing demand, consumers are being encouraged to do their homework before booking an appointment.

Tim Macaulay, director of environmental health at the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health, offered the following advice for spa visitors:

- . Have a look around. Check out the work areas to ensure they're clean, well lit and organized, and that the tools, work surfaces and equipment are in good repair.
- . Watch to ensure spa staff are washing their hands before and after each client.
- . Check that the tools and supplies are stored in a clean area, and preferably in closed containers.
- . Ensure that creams and lotions are used in a way that doesn't contaminate the original product.. Make sure the spa is using clean sheets, towels and robes.

"It's a lot of common sense things," Macaulay said.

But common sense isn't necessarily common, warns Patricia Cassell-Ogilvie, owner of En Vogue Day Spa & Gift Studio in Regina, one of only two Saskatchewan spas belonging to Leading Spas of Canada. Temple Gardens Mineral Spa in Moose Jaw is also a member of the national organization, which requires members to adhere to stringent standards.

"People have to be concerned and careful about when they're doing the spa treatments," said Cassell-Ogilvie, who is on the Leading Spas of Canada national board.

Minor skin irritations or infections can turn into something serious, she cautioned. For example, something as minor as a nick from shaving your legs, then coming in contact with an improperly cleaned pedicure sink, could result in a staph infection, she said.

"Some people have lost a leg; some people have actually died from that kind of thing," Cassell-Ogilvie said.

While there have been no reports of serious health concerns resulting from treatments performed at Saskatchewan spas, Cassell-Ogilvie has been a vocal advocate for introducing provincial regulations here.

"The problem is, there are not any standards specific to spas," she said. "So there aren't any laws regarding cleanliness and sterilization. It's imperative that we get some standards because there can be serious diseases picked up by tools or pedicure chairs not being cleaned properly.

"My goal would be to have everyone in the city be part of the Leading Spas of Canada," Cassell-Ogilvie said, noting this would require all spas to go through a stringent process to qualify for membership in the organization.

"The government needs to put some sort of legislation into place that all spas have to follow," she recommended.

Regulations need to be set in place as a safeguard - reflecting the needs of the spas, and protecting the health and safety of spa clients, as well as staff, she said.

Cassell-Ogilvie is passionate about being proactive and getting spa legislation in place "before someone actually gets hurt badly."

"I'm surprised there hasn't been a major scare (in Saskatchewan)," she said. "It's only a matter of time until something does happen. Do we have to wait until that happens? **"It's really a serious issue. We need to be proactive, not reactive."**

Today, there are two regulations that can apply to spas, Macaulay explained. The current public health act contains general provisions that address personal service facilities, which offer everything from manicures, pedicures and massages to tattooing and electrolysis.

"The provisions state that no one can operate a personal services facility in a manner that can cause the spread or transmission of a communicable disease, or operate it in an unsanitary manner," he said, adding that there are also provisions relating to whirlpools in spa facilities.

"In support of these regulations, we have guidelines that are used by the regional health authority public health inspectors to determine whether or not the facility is operating in compliance with the intent of the regulations," he explained.

The guidelines speak to everything from the materials used within the facility, such as floor coverings and counter tops, to the need for hand-wash basins, disinfection and sterilization procedures.

It's not mandatory for Saskatchewan spas to be visited regularly by public health inspectors, Macaulay said.

"It depends on what kind of facility it is. We tend to focus our attention more on high-risk type facilities. So, where there's invasive procedures that are being performed. Tattooing and body piercing would be an example of that," he said.

Spas offering lower-risk services, such as manicures, pedicures and massages, are only visited on a complaint basis, Macaulay said. But spas with whirlpools have their whirlpools inspected on a regular basis.

"We don't have any reason to believe that these facilities are posing a great problem," Macaulay said.

But if that should change, more public health attention would need to be directed to these types of facilities, he added.

"There's still a need for these types of facilities to follow proper procedures, so that they do not create a risk to their customers," Macaulay said.

Saskatchewan spa operators can contact their local health region to get advice on the use of proper procedures.

The Ministry of Health is currently working on a best management practice document, which will be posted on its website.

"If an individual has serious concerns about the improper operation of a facility, they should contact their local health region and voice those concerns, and the public health inspectors will follow up on that," he said.