

Clients got HIV through 'Vampire facial' microneedling treatments

April 26 2024, by Ernie Mundell



Between 2018 and the spring of 2023, a cluster of clients who had gotten 'vampire facial' microneedling skin treatments at a New Mexico spa were diagnosed with HIV, probably via poorly cleaned instruments, a

new report finds.

When HIV arises among people without known [risk factors](#), doctors "might consider cosmetic injection services as a route of HIV transmission," wrote a team led by researcher Anna Stadelman-Behar, of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The cluster of new HIV infections first came to the attention of public health officials back in the summer of 2018. That's when a woman in her 40s with no history of risk factors for HIV nonetheless tested positive for the virus while traveling abroad.

She had undergone a microneedle-based "vampire facial" at the New Mexico spa in the spring of 2018.

In these [cosmetic procedures](#), a client's blood is drawn and then separated into its component cells and plasma.

Next needles—ideally a [single-use](#) or fully sterilized multi-use needles—are used to re-inject the "platelet-rich plasma" blood back into the face. The procedure is used to (allegedly) rejuvenate the skin.

Between 2018 and the spring of 2023, three other of the spa's female clients with no prior HIV risk factors also tested positive for HIV. Most did not even realize they carried the virus until they developed advanced AIDS-like symptoms.

The patients were all in their 40s and 50s, Stadelman-Behar's team said.

A fifth case of new HIV infection was detected in the male sexual partner of one of the infected women.

This couple had been in a long-term [sexual relationship](#), and their HIV

infection was so advanced by the time it was detected that CDC investigators believe they may have already been HIV-positive before they received their spa treatments.

Still, the exact source of the HIV involved in this cluster of cases remains unclear, the researchers said.

The spa closed in the fall of 2018, around the time that an on-site inspection revealed numerous lapses in hygiene and sterilization.

For example, a centrifuge and a rack of unlabeled tubes of blood were found on a kitchen counter; unlabeled tubes of botox and blood were stored in a household refrigerator alongside food; and unwrapped syringes were found lying on counters and drawers.

There was no autoclave (a standard steam-based sterilizer) on the premises and sterilization was substandard, the CDC team said.

The report highlights the fact that any blood-based spa treatment can be a potential source for HIV transmission, especially if proper sterilization of needles and other equipment is lacking.

"Requiring adequate infection control practices at spa facilities offering cosmetic injection services can help prevent the transmission of HIV and other blood-borne pathogens," Anna Stadelman-Behar and colleagues concluded.

The study was published April 25 in the CDC journal *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

More information: Find out more about how to protect yourself against HIV at the [U.S. National Institutes of Health](#).

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