



Cosmetic Injection Transmits HIV

Cases linked to a New Mexico spa mark the first documented instances.

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A cluster of HIV cases from 2018 has been linked to vampire facials, a type of microneedling procedure, at a now-shuttered medical spa in Albuquerque. At least three women contracted HIV in what federal health researchers say is the first documented instance of HIV transmission through cosmetic injection, according to findings in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), a publication of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The vampire facial HIV story first made headlines in 2019, when the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) notified the public that a woman tested positive for HIV but had no known risk factors except for exposure to needles during a vampire facial the previous year at VIP Spa.

A vampire facial is a cosmetic procedure that involves injecting nutrient-rich plasma into the skin on the face to achieve a more youthful appearance. The plasma is typically collected from an individual's own blood before the facial.

The spa had closed in September 2018 because of unsafe practices and didn't keep precise records. Nonetheless, NMDOH and CDC health experts cross-checked available documentation to identify cases and offered former spa clients free and confidential testing. In April 2019, NMDOH announced that two clients had been diagnosed with the same strain of HIV.

In the 2024 MMWR report, CDC officials provided more details about the investigation. In 2021, the New Mexico Attorney General's office filed 24 felony charges against the former owner of VIP Spa. In July 2023, New Mexico health officials announced that a third case of HIV had been linked to vampire facials at the Albuquerque establishment. Officials also reminded former clients to get tested for HIV as well as hepatitis B and C.

A properly performed vampire facial shouldn't expose individuals to HIV, hepatitis or other blood-borne diseases. But if the equipment used during the procedure, such as a microneedling pen, is not disposed of correctly or sterilized between facials, the risk of exposure to such diseases is

high.