

The real cost of a Hollywood smile

Would you have your legs waxed by a dentist? No, neither would we. Yet, across the country, beauticians are offering cut-price deals on teeth-whitening performed by spa staff. *Company* went undercover to investigate the real cost of the perfect smile...

as she lay back in the reclining chair and opened wide, a terrible fear gripped Emma Jones. The pictures on the glossy flyer had somehow made the tatty piercing parlour look like a professional dental practice, and in fact that was part of the reason Emma had chosen to get her teeth whitened there in the first place. But, when the 26-year-old teaching assistant from Brighton arrived, she immediately knew she'd made a mistake. Yet she didn't want to make a fuss, so she shut her eyes and tried not to worry. Within minutes, Emma was shrieking in

agony. "There was a sharp shooting pain in the roots of my teeth," she explains. "I told the therapist it was hurting but she said this was normal and carried on."

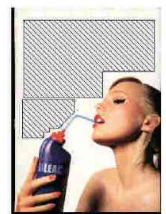
In the end, unable to bear it any longer, Emma begged her to stop halfway through the procedure. But she still had to pay the full amount – £100 – and saw no difference in the teeth that had been treated.

"Over the phone I was told I'd need a consultation. But, in fact, this was just a chat before a consent form was thrust into my hands. I should have backed out then, but I was too embarrassed."

Luckily for Emma, the pain subsided

after a few days and her dentist has reassured her there's no long-term damage. But the outcome could have been very different. Emma didn't realise at the time, but by opting to get her teeth whitened in a high-street salon rather than at a registered dentist, she was risking permanent damage.

CHEMICAL REACTION



In the last few years 'Hollywood smiles' have become big business. In a recent *Company* survey, 37% of you expressed a desire for cosmetic dentistry. But where are you getting your dream smile? Lured in by cheap deals that undercut more expensive dentists, many women are unaware that beauticians who may have only had a day's training, are carrying out the procedure.

Although these treatments are marketed as a cheaper and safer alternative to

bleaches containing peroxide dyes (which cost between

£300 and £1,000 and are carried out by a dentist), many beauty salons use chlorine dioxide – an acid used for industrial cleaning and water purification – which can strip away tooth enamel and cause long-term damage.

Stephanie Ramezan, 25, knows only too well how severe this can be. She thought she'd found a bargain when she chose to have her teeth whitened at a spa two years ago. But little did she realise the chlorine dioxide would discolour her teeth and damage the surface of them. "The treatment cost £200, and at first I was concerned that it was so cheap, but when I asked why they told me it was their special January offer," she says. "I suppose I was naïve in not thinking of going to a dentist." Stephanie claims there were no dentists performing the treatment at the central London spa, only beauty therapists. She admits that at first, her smile did appear more polished and fresh, but two days

'There was a sharp pain in the roots of my teeth, but the therapist carried on'

afterwards her teeth became painfully sensitive and turned brown. Despite several complaints to the salon, she was told staff couldn't help her.

"I was shocked at how unprofessional they were," she adds. "Even the beauticians at the salon thought my teeth looked darker, but no one knew

what to do about it."

Linda Greenwall, chairman of the British Dental Bleaching Society and a specialist in restorative dentistry, says: "Although chlorine dioxide treatments are advertised as safe by beauticians, this is certainly not the case. This chemical is too acidic to treat teeth. I've seen many women like Emma and Stephanie, and although we try to rectify the damage, it's not always possible when chlorine has been used." The problem is that chlorine corrodes the enamel, making teeth look dull, and feel rough and sensitive. In some cases they even look more stained than they were before treatment. And according to Linda Greenwall, there are other side-effects too. "Chlorine can cause breathing difficulties and suddenly increase your heart rate, making it unsuitable for some asthma sufferers." So, if chlorine dioxide is so controversial, why is it still being used?

THE LOOPHOLE

In 2001, a European law was introduced making it illegal for bleaching products containing more than 0.1 per cent hydrogen peroxide to be used in teeth whitening procedures in the UK. Although dentists believe this is the safest and most effective way of bleaching teeth, and are currently lobbying the Government for this law to be changed for qualified professionals, many beauticians started using chlorine-based products in order to avoid prosecution.

But the industry wants to take it a step further, making it illegal for anyone other than a registered dentist, or dental care professional, to practise teeth whitening.

A spokesperson for the Department of Health says that, in his opinion, "Anyone who applies a teeth-whitening product to another person is undertaking dentistry. Under the Dentists Act 1984, only dentists and dental care professionals, like dental hygienists, can undertake the practice of dentistry. Therefore, we believe beauticians and hairdressers who apply these products are breaking the law."

The General Dentist Council (GDC), which regulates the profession, also agrees that unqualified high-street beauticians who carry out any teeth-whitening procedures should

not be doing so. Duncan Rudkin, chief executive of the GDC, says: "As the UK dental regulator, our priority is to protect the public. Teeth whitening by non-dental professionals, for example at beauty salons and hairdressers, can be dangerous. We believe it should be illegal for anyone other than a registered dental professional to do it and would urge anyone thinking about teeth whitening to speak to their dentist first."

In September 2007, the GDC successfully prosecuted Ben Nahab at Norwich magistrates' court after he pleaded guilty to carrying out a teeth-whitening demonstration he was not qualified to do, on dental nurse Chloe Brotherhood. It left her in severe pain for 15 days.

But despite this success and claims the GDC are investigating clinics using chlorine dioxide, there haven't been any prosecutions since. And although the Conservative party has been putting > pressure on the Government to introduce new legislation to regulate high-street teeth whitening and the chemicals used, this could take some time. Until then, it's up to you to know the dangers.

THE INVESTIGATION

Keen to see what goes on in high-street salons and spas, *Company* went undercover to investigate this new trend. A web search found hundreds of cut-price 'Hollywood smile' treatments advertised on the internet.

We picked five establishments around the country at random, which were all offering cheap teeth whitening. We either went into the salon in person or phoned to ask for a consultation, checking if the person doing the whitening was a qualified dentist and what chemicals they'd be using.

● Sunset Teeth Whitening, Romford, Essex

"This was one of the first websites I came across, and boasted proudly: 'Our procedure is approved by dentists.' Posters in the salon offered the treatment for £99 (or £74.50 each for two people at the same time), but I realised it looked nothing like a dental surgery. The room also doubled up as a sun-bed shop. I told them I wanted to book the treatment for

me and my sister, who was getting married the following week, and was led to the back of the shop, where the teeth whitening takes place. I was told it only takes an hour, is very safe and that they use chlorine dioxide. When asked whether the consultant was a trained dentist, he joked, 'No I'm not but I've been doing this for years. I could teach dentists a thing or two.' I wasn't asked whether I had any medical or dental problems, and was told I'd need to sign a consent form before the procedure."

Sunset Teeth Whitening says: "We are not doing anything illegal, and until the Government changes the law we will continue to use chlorine. We have a great record and have never had a complaint. Dentists say we shouldn't offer this procedure as they're trying to protect their own jobs. They should stop interfering and let those, like myself, with years of experience, get on with what we're good at."

● **Essential Beauty, Sheffield**

"Here they offered teeth whitening alongside haircuts, piercings, tattoos and waxing. I was told I'd just missed out on the £75 offer, which had ended the month before, but at £99 it was still a good deal and offered a 10 per cent discount to students. They claimed to 'use the same procedure as dentists' and when quizzed about what this meant, they confessed to using a gel containing 0.6 per cent hydrogen peroxide – higher than the legal limit – which would be applied by a beautician."

Essential Beauty says: 'Until things change and the law is clarified, we will not be offering teeth-whitening treatments. However, before beauticians were allowed to attend training courses, perhaps the Government should have thought about who is allowed to carry it out. I've spent thousands of pounds on the equipment. The beauty salons are being left out of pocket.'

● **Jems Spa, Wolverhampton**

"I came across Jems Spa services on Gumtree.com. Half-price during January only. Dental strength, one hour, one visit, one brighter smile. Immediate results – not trays,' it claimed. The website also advertised Reiki and crystal healing. I called for more info and was

told I wouldn't need a consultation beforehand, like a dentist would have, as they'd have to increase the price. They do the consultation and procedure in one, at a cost of £100. I was told to pay a £50 deposit, which would be refunded if I wasn't suitable for treatment. When asked what chemical was used she revealed it was chlorine dioxide."

Jems Spa says: 'Chlorine dioxide is a legal product for teeth whitening. Many teeth-whitening companies, including all the larger ones, now opt for the legal chlorine dioxide system. The GDC is the only organisation that says teeth whitening should only be carried out by dentists. However, the House of Lords passed a judgement on 28 June 2001 stating that teeth whitening is a cosmetic treatment and not dentistry. I therefore act

fully within my restrictions as a teeth-whitening technician, in which I am fully qualified and fully insured. The consultation is carried out during the appointment time, eradicating any extra cost to the client for a separate appointment. If the client is unsuitable for treatment there is nil charge and the treatment is not carried out. I am sure this is preferable to having to pay a £45-£60 consultation charge prior to possible non-treatment.

● **Teeth White, London**

"I found this clinic on Edgware Road after spotting their knock-down price of £75 on Gumtree.com. I called to book a consultation but was told it isn't necessary. 'We only take bookings for appointments. If you have any questions, I can answer them over the phone or via email,' I'm told. Again, she admits to using chlorine dioxide and no questions are asked about my dental health."

Teeth White says: *Company* approached Teeth White to give them the opportunity to comment on our findings, however they declined to respond.

● **The Tanning Factory and Beauty Clinic, Bedford**

"This high-street shop, which also offers manicures and massages, told me they could brighten my teeth by up to ten shades for just £99. The procedure is carried out by a 'teeth technician' – yet

she's not a dental professional. I was told she would examine my teeth and gums first to check for potential problems, but they rarely find reasons for clients not to have treatment. They also admitted they use a dental shield to protect teeth while applying a gel with 0.5 cent hydrogen peroxide – higher than the safe limit."

The Tanning Factory and Beauty Clinic says: "You are right that the EU Cosmetic Directive 76/768 states that only 0.1% peroxide is permitted in a cosmetic treatment, and I have contacted my supplier to ensure that is the case. This has highlighted a training issue with our staff and it will be carried out immediately, as we only use 0.1% and a non-peroxide teeth whitening gel. Teeth whitening has been deemed a cosmetic treatment by the House of Lords. Upon our own legal advice we are confident that we're operating within law. We have substantial evidence to prove that teeth whitening carried out by our trained therapists does not cause damage. We have ensured, at considerable investment, that we have gone about our business properly. I feel that dentists have been ripping people off, charging the prices that they have for years, and now are trying to flex their muscle to squeeze small companies like us out of the market by using scare-mongering tactics.

What the experts say:

"A beauty salon will make you sign a disclaimer form, which normally gets them out of potential legal problems if it all goes wrong," warns Dr Anoop Maini from [Aqua Dental Spa](#), and member of the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. "Your dentist is governed by a watchdog and can be struck off if a complaint is upheld. You don't have the same accountability with a beautician."

Other experts were shocked that so many salons were using beauticians to carry out teeth whitening. "It's staggering that beauticians think they know what they're doing, especially with chlorine because it's so damaging," says Sir Paul Beresford. Conservative MP for Mole Valley and a qualified dentist. "I'm pushing for a law change in the House of Commons, but until then it's up to you to know the risks. You only get one set of teeth, so it's not a risk worth taking."

'CHEAP WHITENING TURNED MY TEETH YELLOW'

Rachel*, 24, a PA from London, went to a beauty salon for a smile she'll always regret...



"I'd always wanted my teeth to be whiter. I often drink tea and red wine, which meant there was some discolouration, so I booked teeth whitening with my dentist. But then I saw a beauty salon offering it for just £175 – £125 cheaper than my dentist. I went in, and the salon looked clean, professional and was open to my questions. 'We use chlorine dioxide as we think it's safer and more effective than hydrogen peroxide,' the beautician told me. I went home and Googled the chemical and couldn't find any bad reports about it, so I booked an appointment.

The procedure lasted just over an hour. A gel was applied, then a laser was used to speed up the process. At first I was happy with the results, as my teeth were a lot whiter.

But it didn't last long. Two days later, at work, I ran my tongue over my teeth. They felt rough and dry, like sandpaper, so I ran to the toilets to have a look. I was mortified. It looked like the enamel had been eaten away and they'd turned yellow-brown. Trying not to cry, I was too embarrassed to open my mouth to talk, and my teeth felt so sensitive.

That evening I went back to the salon, but they said I hadn't used the after-care gel properly, which wasn't true. To get my money back I'd have to complain to the manufacturer.

I wrote to them but never heard anything. I went to my dentist, who managed to get my teeth back to an OK standard, although they're still not as white as before.

If I'd known then about the dangers of chlorine dioxide, I wouldn't have had it done. If you're thinking of having your teeth whitened, make sure you go to your dentist, even if it costs a bit more. Don't make the same mistake as I did."

Words: Nada Fairhead. Photographs: David Newton. With thanks to Rebecca Rampling. * Names have been changed

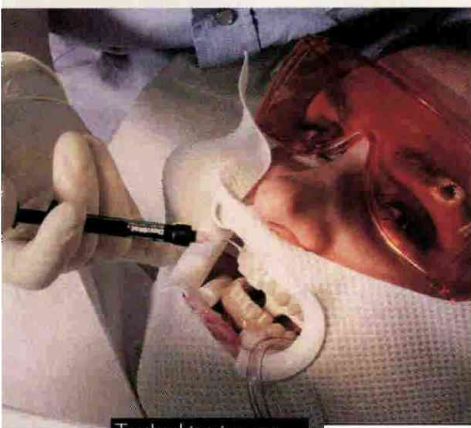
SAFETY GUIDE

If you're thinking of having your teeth whitened, take note of our advice first...

- Consult your dentist first and book an appointment with the hygienist, who will clean your teeth in preparation for the treatment.
- Ask what chemical they are using. Don't be fooled into thinking chlorine dioxide is safe.
- Check that the procedure is being carried out by a qualified dental professional. You can ask for their registration number and look them up on the General Dental Council website, www.gdc-uk.org
- Ask for your top teeth to be bleached first, so that you can compare your natural colour on the bottom. A few shades is normally enough to get the desired colour.

To report anyone you believe is not qualified to carry out teeth whitening, email the General Dental Council on illegalpractice@gdc-uk.org





Teeth whitening can be painful if not carried out by an expert

