“Vampire Facial” Salon Owner Faces 24 Felony Charges After HIV Cases

The former owner of VIP Salon was indicted after two clients who received “vampire facials” tested HIV positive.

April 23, 2021 By Trent Straube

The New Mexico Attorney General’s office filed 24 felony charges against the former owner of VIP Salon, where at least two clients tested positive for HIV after undergoing a cosmetic procedure nicknamed the vampire facial in 2018. Also called platelet-rich plasma (PRP) therapy, the procedure is not a mode of HIV transmission when performed properly.

The HIV cases linked to the now-defunct Albuquerque spa were made public in 2019, prompting the state attorney general’s office to investigate the business and its owner, Maria de Lourdes Ramos de Ruiz. That led to the 24 indictments filed April 19, according to a press release from Attorney General Hector Balderas.

The federal charges include practicing medicine without a license, racketeering, fraud, money laundering and tax evasion.

“Individuals who jeopardize the health and safety of New Mexican families must be held accountable,” said Balderas in the press release, which includes copies of the indictments. “We look forward to presenting this case at trial.”

As POZ reported in 2019 in the article “Two HIV Cases Linked to ‘Vampire Facials’ in New Mexico”:

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 typically comes from an individual’s own blood.

When the procedure is carried out properly, it shouldn’t expose anyone to HIV, hepatitis or other blood-borne diseases. But if equipment used, such as a micro-needling pen, is not disposed of correctly or sterilized between facials, the risk of exposure to such diseases is high.

The VIP Spa closed in September 2018 after it was determined that some of its practices could have led to the spread of diseases, such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, according to a press release from the New Mexico Department of Health.

In announcing the indictments, the attorney general's office also offered advice to consumers:

The attorney general recommends that anyone who is planning to undergo PRP therapy make sure that they are receiving the procedure from a properly licensed medical professional and that the establishment is using universal precautions to sterilize equipment and prevent the spread of blood-borne pathogens.

Consumers should ask questions of providers of PRP therapy or "Vampire Facials" prior to undergoing the procedure. Consumers have the right to know:

1. Whether or not the establishment uses universal precautions—similar to tattoo parlors or a medical facility.

2. What precautions are utilized?

3. Who will be performing the procedure?

4. Will it be performed by a licensed medical professional? Cosmetologists and aestheticians are not licensed to conduct medical procedures. At a minimum one must be qualified as a phlebotomist to draw blood, and if injections are administered below the subdermis, a nurse or physician must perform the procedure.

5. Does the establishment have a medical director? If so, what are their qualifications? Is it a physician or a nurse practitioner?

Blood is not the only body fluid through which HIV is transmitted. The virus can also be contracted through breast milk, semen, pre-cum, rectal fluids and vaginal fluids. To learn more see HIV Transmission and Risks, part of the HIV/AIDS Basics available on POZ.com.

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