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For Consumers

Removing Hair Safely

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FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health regulates electrolysis equipment and lasers. Chemical depilatories, waxes, and shaving creams and gels fall under the jurisdiction of FDA's Office of Cosmetics and Colors in the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. The practice of professional hair removal is generally regulated by state and local authorities. Here are some tips related to common methods of hair removal.

Laser Hair Removal

In this method, a laser destroys hair follicles with heat.

Sometimes it is recommended that a topical anesthetic product be used before a laser hair removal procedure, to minimize pain. In these cases, FDA recommends that consumers discuss with a medical professional the circumstances under which the cream should be used, and whether the use is appropriate.

Those who decide to use a skin-numbing product should follow the directions of a health care provider and consider using a product that contains the lowest amount of anesthetic drugs possible. FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research has received reports of serious and life-threatening side effects after use of large amounts of skin-numbing products for laser hair removal.

Side effects of laser hair removal can include blistering, discoloration after treatment, swelling, redness, and scarring. Sunlight should be avoided during healing after the procedure.

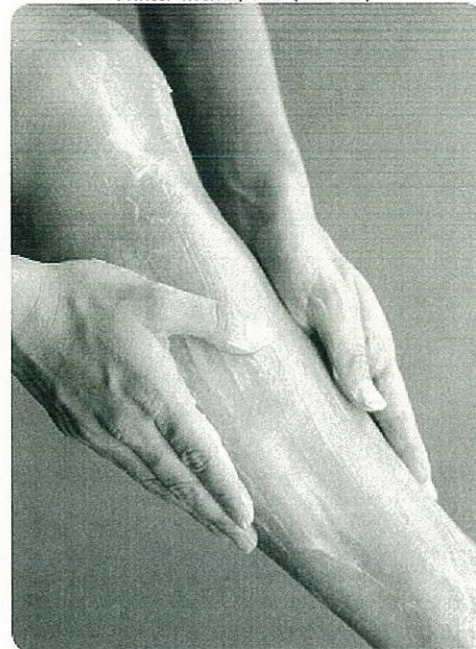
Epilators: Needle, Electrolysis, and Tweezers

Needle epilators introduce a fine wire close to the hair shaft, under the skin, and into the hair follicle. An electric current travels down the wire and destroys the hair root at the bottom of the follicle, and the loosened hair is removed with tweezers.

Medical electrolysis devices destroy hair growth with a shortwave radio frequency after a thin probe is placed in the hair follicle. Risks from these methods include infection from an unsterile needle and scarring from improper technique. **Electrolysis is considered a permanent hair removal method**, since it destroys the hair follicle. It requires a series of appointments over a period of time.

Tweezer epilators also use electric current to remove hair. The tweezers grasp the hair close to the skin, and energy is applied at the tip of the tweezer. There is no body of significant information establishing the effectiveness of the tweezer epilator to permanently remove hair.

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From creams to high-tech lasers, FDA regulates a host of hair removal options, each with its own risks and benefits.