



California Manicurist

Practice test

April 6, 2026

Time limit: 75 minutes

Official exam page

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Online timed practice

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Answer key for this session (PDF):

californiacerts.com/resources/pdfs/ca-manicurist/ca-manicurist-practice-solution.pdf

1. What is the hyponychium?
 - A. The thickened skin beneath the free edge of the nail plate
 - B. The nail matrix beneath the base of the nail
 - C. The visible white tip of the nail plate
 - D. The cuticle fold over the nail base
2. A client presents with psoriasis on their scalp. The cosmetologist should:
 - A. Refer to a physician and reschedule
 - B. Apply medicated shampoo and continue
 - C. Refuse service entirely
 - D. Perform the service carefully if no open or bleeding lesions are present
3. A licensee cuts a client and draws blood. What is the correct first response?
 - A. Apply antiseptic and continue immediately
 - B. Continue the service wearing gloves
 - C. Discard all tools and continue with new ones
 - D. Stop service, cover wound, remove and disinfect contaminated tools
4. Under California law, a cosmetology establishment must display which of the following prominently?
 - A. Only the health inspection report
 - B. Establishment license and all individual practitioner licenses where visible to clients
 - C. No display is required — licenses are held digitally
 - D. Only the establishment license at the reception desk
5. Which of the following is a non-porous surface that can be effectively disinfected?
 - A. A wooden cuticle pusher
 - B. A porous sponge applicator
 - C. A metal shear blade
 - D. A fabric cape

6. What is the purpose of wearing gloves when applying chemical services?
- A. They improve grip on tools during chemical services
 - B. Protect from chemical burns, skin sensitization, and absorption of harmful chemicals
 - C. They eliminate the need for an SDS review
 - D. Required only when using bleach products
7. Which of the following conditions requires the licensee to refuse service?
- A. A client with head lice (pediculosis)
 - B. A client with dandruff
 - C. A client with a minor cut on their arm
 - D. A client with dry, flaky scalp
8. What does SPF (Sun Protection Factor) measure?
- A. How long a sunscreen extends the skin's natural UVB protection
 - B. The moisturizing level of the product
 - C. How resistant the skin is to UVA rays
 - D. The percentage of chemical UV filters in the formula
9. Which layer of the epidermis contains melanocytes (pigment-producing cells)?
- A. Stratum germinativum (stratum basale)
 - B. The subcutis layer
 - C. The dermis
 - D. Stratum corneum (outermost layer)
10. When performing a pedicure, a foot file or pumice stone is used to:
- A. Massage deeper tissue during pedicure
 - B. Apply color evenly to the toenails
 - C. Disinfect the foot surface before soaking
 - D. Remove callus buildup and rough skin from heels and balls of feet
11. Under California law, nail files used on a client must be:
- A. Autoclaved between uses
 - B. Soaked in disinfectant solution for 10 minutes and reused
 - C. Wiped with alcohol and reused for the next client
 - D. Discarded after each client or given to the client to take home
12. What is the purpose of cuticle oil in a manicure service?
- A. Disinfect the cuticle before service
 - B. Harden the cuticle for easier removal
 - C. Strengthen the nail plate before polish
 - D. Moisturize and condition the cuticle and proximal nail fold, preventing dryness
13. What is the primary route of transmission for head lice in a salon?
- A. Airborne droplets in the salon
 - B. Direct head-to-head contact and shared tools, combs, and linens
 - C. Contaminated water in the shampoo bowl
 - D. Skin-to-skin contact with the hands
14. Which EPA registration category indicates a disinfectant is effective against both bacteria and viruses?
- A. Hospital-grade or broad-spectrum disinfectant
 - B. Quaternary ammonium compound at any concentration
 - C. Disinfectant labeled for household use only
 - D. Bacteriostatic disinfectant
15. California BBC inspectors have the authority to enter a licensed cosmetology establishment:
- A. Only on scheduled inspection dates
 - B. During business hours without prior notice
 - C. Only with a court order
 - D. Only after a formal complaint has been filed
16. Which of the following best describes a bactericide?
- A. A chemical that kills bacteria
 - B. A product that removes bacteria without chemicals
 - C. A natural antibacterial derived from plants
 - D. A chemical that inhibits bacterial growth without killing them
17. What is the correct order of steps when disinfecting tools at a cosmetology or barbering station?
- A. Disinfect, rinse, clean, dry
 - B. Rinse, disinfect, clean, dry
 - C. Clean, rinse, disinfect, rinse, dry
 - D. Disinfect, clean, rinse, dry
18. Which of the following describes a first-degree (superficial) burn?
- A. Charring and nerve damage
 - B. Blistering and damage into the dermis
 - C. Redness and minor pain affecting only the epidermis, no blistering
 - D. Full thickness damage through all skin layers

19. A client arrives with an open sore on their scalp. The licensee should:
- Proceed carefully while wearing gloves
 - Refer the client to a dermatologist and continue the service
 - Apply antiseptic and cover the area before proceeding
 - Refuse service until the condition has healed
20. What does a bluish tint in the nail plate most commonly indicate?
- Excessive iron deposits in the nail bed
 - Normal nail pigmentation variation
 - Reduced oxygen levels in the blood (cyanosis)
 - A reaction to dark nail polish
21. California requires cosmetology students to complete what percentage of their required training hours before being eligible to take the written exam?
- 50% of required hours
 - No hours required before scheduling the exam
 - 75% of required hours
 - 100% of required hours verified by their school
22. Which of the following is the correct order for hand washing in a salon setting?
- Apply hand sanitizer instead of soap and water
 - Wet hands, rinse, apply soap, lather 5 seconds, dry
 - Apply soap, wet hands, lather 10 seconds, rinse, air dry
 - Wet hands, apply soap, lather 20 seconds, rinse, dry with clean towel
23. Which of the following is the primary purpose of performing a thorough client consultation before a nail service?
- To determine how much time to allocate for the appointment
 - To identify contraindications and tailor the service safely
 - To document the client's preferred nail polish colors
 - To upsell additional nail services to the client
24. What is the purpose of a nail dehydrator before applying nail enhancements?
- Add moisture before applying enhancements
 - Apply color more evenly
 - Disinfect the nail plate
 - Remove surface moisture and oils to improve adhesion and reduce lifting
25. Which of the following is required on the label of every professional chemical product?
- Pricing and expiration date only
 - The salon's name and purchase date
 - Instructions for use and fragrance ingredients only
 - Product name, hazard warnings, and manufacturer information
26. A California cosmetology license must be renewed how often?
- Every year
 - Every two years
 - Every five years
 - Every three years
27. Gel nail polish requires curing under which type of light?
- Chemical catalyst mixed into the gel
 - Heat from a warming lamp
 - Air drying only
 - UV or LED light to trigger polymerization
28. What is the nail matrix?
- The tissue beneath the base of the nail plate that produces the nail plate
 - The visible nail plate above the finger
 - The cuticle that overlaps the nail plate
 - The nail groove on the sides of the nail
29. The purpose of a cuticle softener or remover in a manicure service is to:
- Break down dead cuticle skin so it can be pushed back or removed safely
 - Strengthen the nail plate before applying gel
 - Harden the cuticle for easier removal
 - Disinfect the cuticle area before a nail service
30. California SB 803, effective January 1, 2022, created a new license type for professionals who want to provide hairstyling services without chemical services. This license is called:
- Nail Technician
 - Hairstylist
 - Esthetician
 - Cosmetology Apprentice
31. What is the correct response when a client has tinea unguium (nail fungus) during a nail service appointment?
- Proceed if the client signed a waiver
 - Refuse the nail service — tinea unguium is contagious
 - Apply antifungal nail polish and proceed
 - File away the affected area and continue

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32. Which nail shape is considered strongest because it follows the natural shape of the fingertip?
- A. Square
 - B. Stiletto (pointed)
 - C. Oval or round
 - D. Coffin (ballerina)
33. Effleurage in a facial massage refers to:
- A. Rapid tapping or drumming movements
 - B. Vibrating movements using fingertips
 - C. Deep kneading of the muscle tissue
 - D. Light, gliding, stroking movement
34. A nail wrap (silk, linen, or fiberglass) is used to:
- A. Replace gel and acrylic products entirely
 - B. Add length beyond the natural nail tip
 - C. Disinfect the nail plate before polish application
 - D. Reinforce weak or damaged natural nails with fabric mesh
35. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the salon most commonly includes:
- A. A lab coat only
 - B. Nitrile gloves only, no other equipment required
 - C. A face mask and hairnet only
 - D. Gloves, safety glasses, and protective aprons as appropriate
36. What is the difference between a base coat and a top coat in nail polish application?
- A. Both base and top coat are the same product
 - B. Base coat adds shine; top coat prevents discoloration
 - C. Top coat is applied first to protect the nail
 - D. Base coat bonds and prevents staining; top coat seals color and extends wear
37. A French manicure is characterized by:
- A. A natural or pale pink base with white tips mimicking the natural nail
 - B. Bold, dark-colored polish applied to the entire nail
 - C. A two-tone design with gel polish only
 - D. Glitter applied over a clear base coat
38. Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are required to provide information about:
- A. Pricing and wholesale ordering information
 - B. Hazard information, safe handling, PPE requirements, and emergency response
 - C. Only the product ingredients and fragrance profile
 - D. Instructions for mixing chemical formulas
39. How often must disinfectant solution in a wet sanitizer jar be changed?
- A. Once a week
 - B. Daily or whenever visibly contaminated
 - C. Once a month
 - D. After every single use
40. Acrylic nail enhancements are created by combining which two components?
- A. UV gel and a hardener
 - B. Nail primer and base coat only
 - C. Silk fabric and resin adhesive
 - D. Liquid monomer (ethyl methacrylate) and powder polymer
41. What does "sanitation" mean in the context of a salon?
- A. Kill all bacteria but not viruses
 - B. Remove all physical debris from a surface
 - C. Reduce microbial contamination to safe levels but not eliminate all pathogens
 - D. Destroy all microbial life including spores
42. HIV is classified as which type of pathogen?
- A. A food-borne pathogen
 - B. A bloodborne pathogen
 - C. A waterborne pathogen
 - D. An airborne pathogen
43. A comedone is:
- A. A bacterial skin infection
 - B. A type of skin tumor
 - C. A clogged hair follicle — open (blackhead) or closed (whitehead)
 - D. A superficial fungal skin condition
44. Under California Health and Safety Code, cosmetology establishments must maintain hot and cold running water:
- A. Only licensed medical facilities are required to have running water
 - B. Water is optional if alcohol-based sanitizers are used
 - C. Only cold water is required
 - D. Hot and cold running water accessible for sanitation and handwashing

45. What is a paraffin wax treatment used for in nail care?
- A. Harden the nail plate before enhancement application
 - B. Open pores, increase circulation, moisturize deeply, and relieve joint stiffness
 - C. Remove callus and rough skin from hands
 - D. Disinfect the hand and nail surface
46. How must clean, disinfected implements be stored?
- A. In a clean, covered container or drawer separate from soiled tools
 - B. Wrapped in a paper towel until needed
 - C. In an open container on the counter
 - D. Next to the disinfectant jar
47. Single-use items such as neck strips, cotton rounds, and wooden applicators must be:
- A. Used once then discarded
 - B. Disinfected and stored for reuse
 - C. Autoclaved between clients
 - D. Washed with soap and water between clients
48. The correct sequence for a basic manicure service is:
- A. Apply top coat first, then base coat, then color
 - B. Soak, shape, apply color, push cuticles, remove old polish
 - C. Apply base coat, soak, shape, remove old polish, massage
 - D. Remove old polish, shape, soak, treat cuticles, massage, apply base coat and polish
49. When shaping nails with an emery board, the correct technique is to file:
- A. Back and forth in a sawing motion for fastest results
 - B. Only use electric files for proper technique
 - C. In one direction toward the center of the nail
 - D. Always from the center outward
50. Under California law, a cosmetologist found practicing without a current, valid license is subject to:
- A. A written warning only
 - B. No penalty if unlicensed for less than 90 days
 - C. A misdemeanor — subject to fines and potential criminal charges
 - D. An automatic 30-day suspension
51. Which type of disinfectant is EPA-registered and most commonly required for non-porous tools in Texas salons?
- A. EPA-registered hospital-grade disinfectant (quats or phenolics)
 - B. Soap and hot water
 - C. Isopropyl alcohol only
 - D. Bleach diluted in water
52. How must soiled towels and linens be stored in a Texas salon or barbershop?
- A. On the floor near the workstation
 - B. Mixed with clean linens and washed later
 - C. In a closed, covered container separate from clean linens
 - D. Left on the counter until end of day
53. The three layers of the skin from outermost to innermost are:
- A. Dermis, epidermis, subcutis
 - B. Epidermis, dermis, subcutis (hypodermis)
 - C. Subcutis, dermis, epidermis
 - D. Cuticle, cortex, medulla
54. As of January 1, 2022, how many training hours are required to qualify for the California Cosmetology Operator written exam?
- A. 2,000 hours
 - B. 1,000 hours
 - C. 600 hours
 - D. 1,600 hours
55. The California cosmetology written exam is available in which languages as of 2024?
- A. English, Spanish, Korean, Simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog
 - B. English, French, and Spanish
 - C. English and Spanish only
 - D. English only
56. What is the purpose of an autoclave?
- A. Use UV light to kill surface bacteria
 - B. Dry heat metal instruments to 400°F
 - C. Use steam under pressure to sterilize instruments completely
 - D. Circulate disinfectant chemical through a sealed chamber
57. During a client consultation, a manicurist notices the client's nails are unusually thin and bend easily. Which condition does this describe?
- A. Beau's lines
 - B. Onychorrhexis
 - C. Eggshell nails
 - D. Leukonychia

58. What nail condition is characterized by separation of the nail plate from the nail bed?
- A. Onychomycosis
 - B. Leukonychia
 - C. Onycholysis
 - D. Paronychia
59. Which of the following nail conditions requires the cosmetologist to refuse nail services?
- A. Brittle nails (onychorrhexis)
 - B. Nail biting (onychophagy)
 - C. White spots (leukonychia)
 - D. Onychomycosis (nail fungus)
60. The purpose of a nail primer in acrylic nail application is to:
- A. Add shine to the finished nail
 - B. Cure the gel polish under UV light
 - C. Soften the nail plate for easier filing
 - D. Improve adhesion between natural nail and acrylic product, reducing lifting