

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Edwin Lau

## The Hazards of Cosmetics

*A recent consumer report found that more than half of today's most popular lipstick brands — primarily the high-end versions — contain lead. Specifically, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics (safecosmetics.org) said tests on 33 brand-name red lipsticks by the Bodycote Testing Group in Santa Fe Spring, Calif., found that 61 percent had detectable levels of lead.*



Lipstick isn't the only cosmetic Dr. Lau is concerned about. A variety of cosmetics can spark a number of health complications.

And women aren't the only ones affected. Health complications also stem from cosmetic products, such as after-shave and shaving cream, sold to men. A survey in the United Kingdom revealed that 23 percent of women and 13.8 percent of men experience "some sort of adverse reaction to a personal care product over the course of a year." (*Am J Clin Dermatol* 2004;5:327-37.)

### Lipstick & Lead

So what's the big deal about a little lead? Lead can trigger learning, language and behavioral problems, such as reduced school performance and heightened aggressive behavior. Lead exposure is also linked to infertility and miscarriage.

Lead poisoning is cumulative. Eating just one lead-laced chip of paint or applying an occasional swipe or two of lead-tainted lipstick won't spark

serious side effects. However, repeated ingestion of lead products — as may occur with women who wear lipstick on a daily basis for years — may incite health issues.

Ironically, some of the less-expensive lipstick brands tested, such as Revlon, contained no detectable levels of lead. That's the good news. The bad news is the study did not include information on fillers and other potentially dangerous ingredients found in off-brand cosmetics.

Dr. Lau encourages patients to reduce potential toxin exposure whenever possible. In the case of cosmetics, this means becoming aware of which products might be hazardous — and seeking out safe alternatives.

### Mascara & Eye Shadow Dangers

Eye cosmetics — which contain pigments, fragrances, resins and preservatives — are a common cause of eyelid dermatitis (*Am J Contact Dermat* 2001;12:38-9). Many also include mercury as a preservative and germ killer. Federal law allows eye products to contain up to 65 parts per million of mercury.

A well-known cause of neurological damage, mercury accumulates in the body over time: making even minimal exposure potentially dangerous. That's why Minnesota became the first state to ban mercury-laced cosmetics. The ban includes everything from eye liner to lightening creams, soaps and mascara.



Mercury is just one of mascara's problems, however. The lash-enhancing goop is also a perfect incubator for bacteria, making it important to never use a tube longer than three months, share your mascara, neglect to remove it every evening or spit in the tube to moisten it.

The thick, gooey applications can also spark allergic reactions. In one study, French researchers noted that the main ingredient responsible for mascara-related allergy was shellac (*Contact Dermatitis* 2002;46:149-52).

Several popular eye shadow and mascara preparations also contain the allergen rosin, according to experts from the New York University Medical School. "Rosin-sensitive patients should be instructed to read cosmetic ingredient labels before using any product and should realize that the European term 'colophony' is a synonym for rosin." (*Cutis* 1988;42:507-8.)

### Preservative Perils

Preservatives in cosmetics are another potentially dangerous ingredient to look out for.

Chemical-based preservatives found in cosmetics include thimerosal, Euxyl K 400, formaldehyde, Kathon CG, Quaternium 15 and parabens.

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In a recent study involving 2,080 patients, allergy to thimerosal was found in 11.8 percent (*Med Pr* 2006;57:245-9). This particular preservative, also used in some flu vaccines, contains mercury and is linked to potentially serious side effects. Formaldehyde also sparked allergic responses.

Researchers noted that, of the 27 preservatives contained in cosmetics, 16 tested positive as possible allergens.

### Phthalates Warning

Another ingredient to watch for is phthalates. Linked to birth defects, this family of chemicals is found in a variety of personal care items — including lotions, perfumes, deodorants, shampoos and cosmetics. They are also present in countless other consumer products: from plastics to polymer clay.

In addition to birth defects, “Phthalate exposure has been associated with adverse respiratory outcomes in children,” say researchers from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, who also note a link between phthalates and reduced pulmonary function (*Environ Health Perspect* 2004;112:571-4).

### Permanent Makeup Alert

You won’t avoid health complications by going with permanent makeup either.

According to an article published in the *Journal of the German Society of Dermatology*, the demand for permanent makeup — especially lip liner — has risen significantly. But beware: Adverse reactions, including inflammation within the area of tattooing, can occur.

### Organic Products Too

Even all-natural products may spark allergic reactions: due to increased use of natural fragrances and botanic extracts, which researchers note “can also cause problems in their own right or through co-reactivity.” (*Am J Clin Dermatol* 2004;5:327-37.)

If you or someone in your household has a nut allergy, be especially vigilant

about nut oils, such as almond and coconut oils, in the ingredients list.

### Reading Labels

Whether you are looking for rosin or formaldehyde, it’s hard to protect yourself from cosmetic allergens when you can’t read a product’s ingredients list.

In a 2007 survey of 382 patients, 46 percent reported difficulty or extreme difficulty in reading the ingredients labels of cosmetics. “Patients allergic to formaldehyde and methyl dibromoglutaronitrile experienced the worst difficulties, while patients with fragrance allergy found ingredient label reading easier than patients with preservative allergy.” (*Contact Dermatitis* 2007;57:105-9.)

Bottom line: If you are concerned about a particular ingredient, don’t rely on the label. Call the manufacturer for more information.

### Safe Cosmetics Legislation

Fortunately, safe cosmetics legislation is emerging.

Frustrated by what they consider the US Food and Drug Administration’s “loose control over cosmetic safety,” California residents took matters into their own hands by enacting one of the first cosmetics regulatory acts (*Environ Health Perspect* 2006;114:402).

The California Safe Cosmetics Act of 2005 — which went into effect a year ago in January of 2007 — requires manufacturers to “report the use of potentially hazardous ingredients to the state Department of Health Services (DHS), which in turn will alert consumers.”

Manufacturers who continue marketing products deemed unsafe in California now face potential legal action. “Impetus for the law stems from consumers’ concerns over long-term exposure to certain cosmetic ingredients.” (*Environ Health Perspect* 2006;114:402.)

### Buy Safe, Buy Smart

Fortunately, a number of cosmetic companies have pledged to ban the use of potentially dangerous ingredients. For a complete list, go to The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics Web site at [safecosmetics.org](http://safecosmetics.org) and click on “Safer Companies” in the green vertical box on the right-hand side of the homepage.

You can also take a stroll down the aisles of your favorite health food store, where you’ll find a number of all-natural cosmetics to choose from. Just remember: “natural” doesn’t necessarily mean trouble free! Allergic reactions are always possible with any product. Read the ingredients list, and if you have questions, write them down and ask your doctor.



### Natural Radiance

Ultimately, nothing that comes out of a jar, tube or compact can ever replace the natural radiance that comes from being healthy.

Instead of relying on cosmetics, focus on getting plenty of rest, proper nutrition, stress reduction, hydration and regularly scheduled chiropractic care. You’ll look *and* feel great!

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