European Commission

The EU is the safest market in the world for hair dyes



→ IS IT SAFE TO COLOUR MY HAIR?

Hair dyes are among the most popular types of cosmetics on the market, used by more than 60% of women in Europe and between 5 and 10% of men. Europe is a world leader in the cosmetics industry and a dominant cosmetics exporter. As part of the European Union's responsibilities to protect its citizens, hair dyes sold in the EU must meet stringent safety requirements to ensure the highest level of consumer safety while still encouraging innovation and competitiveness in this sector.

The European Commission asks its independent Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS) to conduct risk assessments for several types of consumer products, including hair dyes and other cosmetics. These assessments are made on the basis of studies performed according to high scientific standards.

→ WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT HAIR DYES?

In the past, the main concern about hair dye products was that they might have been associated with a greater risk of developing cancer. Many epidemiological studies have been conducted to investigate a possible link between the use of hair dyes and a risk of blood cancers (leukemias and lymphomas) and bladder cancer.

A further concern has been in relation to allergic contact dermatitis, which some persons have experienced after using hair dye products.

→ ARE THESE CONCERNS VALID?

Hair dyes made before the 1980s contained some chemicals that were later found to cause cancer in animals, even though relevance of the effects to humans is not established. Since then, manufacturers have replaced such chemicals with safer ones in their formulations.

Continued research into the use of hair dyes and the incidence of various types of cancer have shown inconclusive results. Some epidemiological studies had suggested that hairdressers and barbers, who are likely to be most exposed to hair dyes, have a higher incidence of bladder cancer. However, other studies, particularly in Europe, have contradicted these findings. For example, a recent analysis which took into account all the previously published studies has shown that there is no additional risk of bladder cancer from personal hair dye use. The personal use of hair dyes has also not been classified as cancer causing by the World Health Organization.

However, contact allergy from the use of hair dyes is still a common problem amongst the dermatology patients.

→ ARE SOME HAIR DYES OF MORE CONCERN THAN OTHERS?

There are three main types of hair dyes. Temporary and semi-permanent hair dyes are non-oxidative, that means that they coat the hair rather than penetrate it, and wash out with shampooing. Permanent hair dyes (also called oxidative) are of more concern and are also the most widely used. These account for 70 to 80% of the colouring products on the market in Europe. Hair dyes for darker hair colours like brunette shades use stronger concentrations of chemicals than lighter ones, and therefore may expose the users to higher amounts of the dye chemicals.

→ CAN I COLOUR MY HAIR WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT HEALTH RISKS?

Hair dyes are among the most thoroughly assessed cosmetic products on the market in the European Union today.

All hair dyes in the EU must comply with the Cosmetics Regulation which lists colouring ingredients that can be used in hair dye formulations, subject to certain conditions and restrictions. The Cosmetics Regulation also requires manufacturers to include safety warnings on labels for products containing certain substances which can cause sensitisation and allergic skin reactions.

Cosmetic manufacturers are primarily responsible for the safety of their products, and are required by law to ensure that their products have undergone expert scientific safety assessment before they are sold. The process involves preparation of dossiers to show that the substance does not pose a health risk for consumers. These dossiers are then submitted to the European Commission for a risk assessment by the SCCS.

Since 2003, the European Commission has been implementing a global strategy for the safety assessment of hair dyes in Europe. As a result of the strategy, hair dyes have been assessed by the SCCS and more than 100 have been regarded safe and are permitted for use under the Cosmetics Regulation. In addition, more than 180 ingredients were banned either due to negative SCCS opinions or due to the lack of industry's interest to update safety dossiers.

The consumers can therefore be assured that the Commission is constantly vigilant and is continually assessing and managing the risks to keep Europe the safest market in the world for hair dyes and other cosmetic products.

This factsheet is based on 18 Opinions on hair dyes produced by the independent Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS 2013-2016)

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These opinions are available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/consumer_safety/opinions/index_en.htm

Health and Food Safety