

# SELF

## Jessica Alba Went To The Emergency Room Because Of An Allergic Reaction To A Hair Product

The actress and Honest Company founder was inspired to create her new beauty line after a freaky allergic reaction sent her to the ER.



Chances are you don't expect something as seemingly innocent as a hair product to send you to the emergency room, but that's exactly what happened to Jessica Alba. The Honest Company founder says she was inspired to create her Honest Beauty line after the experience. "I had a pretty severe allergic reaction to a couple of haircare and styling products that everyone uses," she tells *The Cut*. "I had to be taken to the emergency room on Father's Day and go on antibiotics...my vision was impaired for almost a week." Alba says she had "swollen, infected corneas," and her doctor pinpointed several ingredients in her hair products as possible culprits.

Experts say this happens more often than you'd think. Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF that he sees patients with allergic reactions from hair products several times a month. "Allergic reactions to hair products are well known to dermatologists," he says.

Goldenberg says ingredients like fragrances, preservatives, surfactants (substances commonly used as detergents or foaming agents), and formaldehyde, the latter of which shows up in many shampoos and was listed as one of the top allergens of 2015 by the American Contact Dermatitis Society, are often to blame. Some hair dyes also label themselves as “PPD free” because there are so many reactions to para-phenylenediamine, a type of permanent dye, he says.

Hair products can cause contact dermatitis, or when your skin becomes red or itchy in response to an irritant, J.P. Maszczak, O.D., chief of Advanced Ocular Care Service and a clinical assistant professor at The Ohio State University, tells SELF. Maszczak says it’s smart to see a doctor for help clearing it up. “Contact dermatitis responds best when it is treated sooner rather than later, so any suspicion of a reaction to a product should result in discontinuing the product and consulting with a doctor as soon as possible,” he says.

Wash-off products like shampoos and conditioners can result in contact dermatitis on the scalp, face, behind the ears, and on the nape of the neck, dermatologist Cynthia Bailey, M.D., a diplomat of the American Board of Dermatology and president and CEO of Advanced Skin Care and Dermatology Inc., tells SELF. Hairsprays can also be problematic because they may contain potential allergens like shellac, synthetic resins, lanolin, and fragrances—and they can land anywhere, she says.

When it comes to your eyes, Tal Raviv, M.D., founder and medical director of the Eye Center of New York, tells SELF that hair products are most likely to cause chemical conjunctivitis, a condition in which the white part of your eye becomes irritated, red, and swollen. “In severe cases, even the cornea (the part that a contact lens rests on) is affected, and that can be dangerous,” he says. But Raviv stresses that most eye reactions to hair products should fall in the “mild” category and clear up on their own or with OTC preservative-free artificial tears.

If you find that you’re having an allergic reaction and you suspect your haircare is to blame, stop using the product immediately. You can consult with your dermatologist to figure out a better option, or if the issue is severe, you can pull a Jessica Alba and head to the ER.