

People Are Experiencing More Negative Side-Effects From Beauty Products Than Ever Before

Should you be worried?

BY KORIN MILLER June 28, 2017



When you buy a beauty product, you automatically assume that it's safe, as you should. After all, many products have gone through extensive testing before they hit shelves. However, people can and do have bad reactions to the beauty products they use—and a new study found that those side effects are higher than they've ever been.

For the study, which was published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, researchers analyzed the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's Adverse Event Reporting System, which stores data on adverse events related to foods, dietary supplements, and beauty products. Here's what they found: From 2004 to 2016, 5,144 side effects were reported, and there was a notable increase between 2015 and 2016 of bad reactions—particularly those caused by hair-care products. The products with the most issues overall? Hair-care products, skin-care products, and tattoos. Notably, personal cleanliness, hair care, and hair-coloring products were the most likely to have “serious health outcomes.” The study authors did not go into specifics about what kinds of reactions were reported.

According to the study, these numbers may not reflect the full amount of complaints that companies get about bad reactions to products, because cosmetics consumers have no legal obligation to share these complaints with the FDA. The study's researchers conclude that better surveillance is needed when it comes to beauty products.

According to the FDA, cosmetic products and ingredients do not require FDA approval before they go on the market. Instead, the companies and people who market beauty products are legally responsible for ensuring the safety of their products.

The study findings are scary, but **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.**, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, says you shouldn't panic over them. "Most products are safer than ever because of regulations and standards applied," he says (for example, the FDA has specific standards on how products can be marketed to consumers, and can pursue enforcement over products that are not compliant with the law). However, he points out, there are more and more products on the market and companies are also using many more ingredients than before. "Some of these newer ingredients may have never been used in cosmetic formulations," he says. "While these products may be safe for most, there surely will be some that are allergic or are irritated with these products."

Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist, says that it could simply be a case of people using more products. "As skincare treatments are becoming increasingly popular, consumers are using more products than ever which is why we are seeing a bump in skin reactions," he says. More people are also combining products, Goldenberg says, which comes with an increased risk that you'll have a bad reaction.

To lower the odds you'll have an issue, Goldenberg recommends using brands recommended by your dermatologist, and looking for products with minimal ingredients, i.e. ones that don't add unnecessary chemicals such as petroleum and phthalates. (*That's why we love this soothing cleanser from the Women's Health Boutique!*)

Zeichner also recommends sticking to fragrance-free products (since fragrances are a common cause of skin allergies) and looking for ones that are hypoallergenic. "Just because a product says that it is natural it [does] not mean that it is safer to use on the skin than traditional products," he says. "Poison ivy is natural as well." And, if you have sensitive skin, he says it's best to avoid harsh ingredients like alpha or beta hydroxy acids or retinol, since they're common causes of skin irritation.

If you're not sure, talk to your dermatologist. He or she should be able to steer you in the right direction.