

SHAPE

Why You Shouldn't Try DIY Cosmetic Fillers At Home

Videos of people using DIY filler pens are popping up all over social media, but you can go ahead and file this under: do not attempt yourself.

By **Korin Miller** | February 19, 2021



Facial fillers are a popular procedure to plump lips or the undereye areas, but it can be costly and time-consuming to get it done through a licensed professional. So, apparently some people are taking matters into their own hands. (Related: [Here's What You Need to Know About COVID Vaccine Side Effects If You Have Cosmetic Fillers](#))

Several videos have popped up on YouTube and TikTok of people doing their own fillers. Most are using what they call hyaluron pens or hyaluronic pens, which are basically big, self-injecting pens designed to deliver fillers to your skin at home...and sans doctor. They also use heavily pressurized air to force fillers into your skin instead of a needle.

And there isn't just one random self-injecting pen out there — there are a bunch. One YouTuber tested out *seven* different hyaluron pens on a quest to find which is "best." Hyaluronic pens are "everywhere," she says in the video.

The pens have also popped up on TikTok. "Y'all, that did something. I felt that," says TikTok user Tanya Martin in one video after injecting herself. "It's in there! I'm just so excited right now."

As you can imagine, doctors aren't impressed. Here's what you need to know about DIY injectable fillers, plus why experts really, really recommend you take a pass on this trend.

What are in these DIY filler pens?

Great question! The pens and fillers are often sold separately, and because they're not approved by the Food and Drug Administration, they're usually yanked off sites such as Amazon and Etsy not long after they go up, making it tough to know what's even allegedly inside. The lack of transparency is a big issue, says New York City dermatologist Doris Day, M.D. "You don't know exactly what's in these pens," she says.

While the ingredients aren't clear, the name of the pens implies that they use hyaluronic acid, a topical skincare ingredient that is "not meant to be put into the skin," says Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City board-certified dermatologist. Doing so can cause "severe skin reactions," such as swelling, hives, permanent scarring, and even blindness, he says.

The FDA warns against buying fillers online, partially for this reason. "NEVER buy dermal fillers on the internet," a report by the organization reads. "They may be fake, contaminated, or harmful. The report adds another important disclaimer: "NEVER get injectable fillers from unlicensed providers or in non-medical settings like hotels or private homes."

What's the danger of DIY injectable fillers?

Dermatologists have a laundry list of issues with these, and safety is a huge concern. "Injectable fillers are absolutely not safe to do yourself at home," says Dr. Zeichner. One of the biggest risks is the risk of vascular occlusion, which causes a blockage of a blood vessel, he says. "This prevents delivery of oxygen and nutrients to the skin and can lead to permanent scarring, or even issues such as blindness." Keep in mind that that's even if you know you're using medical-grade, FDA-approved ingredients and when it's administered by a licensed professional (aka not some sketchy, unknown substance you attempt to inject at home).

With DIY fillers, there's no way to know what's inside the stuff you're putting in your body. That's precisely why the American Med Spa Association warns against their use.

The AMSA also says that you should consider these similar to using an actual needle. "While the injection technology is novel, the treatment is fundamentally the same as traditional filler injections," the organization writes online. "Although there is no needle being used, the skin is still being 'pierced' by the jet of hyaluronic acid." (Related: [People Are Tattooing Their Under-Eyes As a Way to Cover Up Dark Circles](#))

There's a very real risk that you could have an allergic reaction to the filler ingredients — whatever they may be, says Dr. Day, adding that that's "precisely why" you want to have a board-certified physician there if things go wrong. (Signs of an allergic reaction can range from swelling and a rash to anaphylaxis, a severe allergic reaction.)

Safety issues aside, you can also screw up the appearance of your face with DIY fillers, says Dr. Day. "It takes years of study of anatomy, proportions, and injection technique in order to deliver the right amount of product to the right plane of the skin," she says. Doctors use different types of fillers that have different properties, she adds. "Some are stiffer, others are softer, and some are more flexible. We do it in different amounts to carefully work around anatomy to create the desired effect."

It's also just tough to do this kind of thing on yourself, says **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. "The appropriate angle of injections is difficult to perform," he says.

A doctor (such as a plastic surgeon; the gold-standard for getting injectables or fillers) or trained aesthetician (many are fully capable — ask about their training — and often provide these medspa services under the guidance of a physician) knows what will and won't work, says Dr. Day.

If you want to get fillers, Dr. Zeichner recommends seeing "someone properly trained, such as a board-certified dermatologist or plastic surgeon." Even then, Dr. Goldenberg says it's best to take it easy the first time. "I always tell my first-time patients, 'let's do less than you may need initially, get comfortable.'" This usually creates more subtle results that you can build on from there, he says.

Overall, if it wasn't already crystal clear, it's best to skip this "beauty trend." "Creating a DIY filler is probably one of the worst ideas I have ever heard," says Dr. Zeichner putting it bluntly.

Still, if staring at your reflection on Zoom for the past 11 months has made you increasingly more interested in plumping up your lips, it's OK to try something less permanent at home such as a plumping lip gloss, says Dr. Goldenberg says. These cause blood to rush to the surface of the skin, making them temporarily swell. These products are generally considered safe and could give you a better idea of whether fillers are even something you really want.