



COSMETICS AND YOUR HEALTH

The Issue

Cosmetics and grooming aids are part of almost every Canadian's daily routine. Therefore, it is important to know that cosmetics can cause unexpected results, even health risks, if they are not used correctly.

Background

In Canada, cosmetic sales amount to billions of dollars each year. A cosmetic is defined as a beauty preparation (make-up, perfume, skin cream, nail polish) or grooming aid (tooth-paste, soap, shampoo, shaving cream, deodorant). A "cosmetic" includes any substance or mixture of substances manufactured, sold or represented for use in cleansing, improving or altering the complexion, skin, hair or teeth, and include deodorants and perfume.

Some cosmetic products are regulated as drugs if they have a therapeutic effect on your body, such as preventing or controlling disease. For example fluoride-containing toothpastes, sunscreens, and antiperspirants are all regulated as drugs because they may help to prevent a disease (cavities), abnormal physical state (sunburn), or modify an organic function (perspiration). Claims made for a cosmetic on a label or in an advertisement must be accurate so that they do not mislead the public. Certain claims such as increased attractiveness or masculinity, are subjective, and therefore, cannot be regulated. Therapeutic claims, on the other hand, are never acceptable for cosmetic products. Any product that is a drug must have a Drug Identification Number (DIN).

Natural Health Products and DINS

As of January 1, 2004, natural health products that have been authorised for sale by Health Canada will have either a Drug Identification Number (DIN) or a Natural Product Number (NPN) on the label. A DIN or NPN lets the user know that the product has undergone a review of its safety, quality and claims.

To be marketed in Canada, cosmetics must be manufactured, prepared, preserved, packed and stored under sanitary conditions. The manufacturer must also inform the government of all ingredients that are in the cosmetic.

Some cosmetics are known to cause health risks when used improperly. Permanent and semi-permanent hair dyes, for example, must carry label warnings indicating that the product may cause skin irritation or blindness if used on eyebrows and eyelashes.

The Health Risks of Cosmetics

The most common risk of cosmetic use is a sensitivity or allergy to the product's ingredients. This can range from mild irritation or itchiness to painful lesions that damage the skin. Hair dyes are of particular concern, so a patch test should always be done before an application. Any adverse reaction should be reported to the Product Safety Program, at the number given below in the Need More Info section.

Sharing cosmetics or using cosmetics that have been contaminated can expose you to dangerous skin bacteria. Using products



incorrectly can also cause health problems. For example, people using 100% pure essential oils as a perfume or skin softener, rather than diluted mixtures, have reported skin irritations.

Some cosmetics may be toxic to children if swallowed.

Minimizing Your Risk

The following list provides guidelines to help you minimize the risks associated with using cosmetics:

- Always read package directions and warning labels.
- Before using a new cosmetic product, try a patch test on a small area of skin. Wait 24 hours. If there is no reaction, it should be safe to use. In the case of hair dyes, it is important to do the test each time you use it, even if you haven't had problems before.
- Never share cosmetics. This could expose you to someone else's bacteria. Also, if your cosmetics dry out, don't dilute them with water or saliva since this can contaminate them.
- If a product is labelled 'hypo-allergenic,' it can still cause allergic reactions. 'Hypo' means less; therefore, the product does not prevent allergic reactions, it is only less likely to cause them.
- Always wash your hands before putting on make-up.
- Keep your cosmetics away from high temperatures and sunlight. Heat and light can break down the preservatives that keep your cosmetics bacteria-free.
- Never use spray-can cosmetics such as hair spray near a flame or source of heat. The heat can react with the contents causing a fire or explosion.
- Most cosmetics don't have expiry dates. However, it is recommended to change products such as mascara every 3 months to prevent increased risk of eye infection. In general, if you notice a change in the odour, colour or texture of a cosmetic, stop using it.
- Keep cosmetic products and toiletries out of the reach of children. If a child swallows any of these products, contact the Poison Information Centre nearest you, listed on the first page of your telephone book.
- If you have an adverse reaction to a cosmetic, stop using the product immediately. Call your doctor if the reaction is severe or prolonged and report the reaction to a Product Safety Program contact given below.
- Be wary of unrealistic or exaggerated manufacturers' claims especially if they imply drastic or permanent changes to your body or skin structure. If the product makes a therapeutic statement it is regulated as a drug or natural health product, and the labelling should have a Drug Identification Number (DIN) or a Natural Health Product Number (NPN).

Health Canada's Role

All cosmetics sold to consumers in Canada must meet the requirements of the Food and Drugs Act, the current Cosmetic Regulations, and all other applicable legislation to ensure that they are safe to use and do not pose any health risk.

The Cosmetic Regulations of the Food and Drugs Act require that cosmetics sold in Canada must be manufactured, prepared, preserved, packed and stored under sanitary

conditions. The manufacturer must notify Health Canada that it is selling the product and provide a list of the product's ingredients.

Health Canada plans to amend the Cosmetic Regulations to require cosmetics manufacturers to list each product ingredient on the product's label.

Need More Info?

To report any adverse reaction to a cosmetic, please contact:
Cosmetics Program
Consumer Product Safety Bureau,
Product Safety Programme
123 Slater St. 4th floor, P.L. 3504D
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9
Telephone: (613) 946-6452
Facsimile: (613) 952-3039
Email: cosmetics@hc-sc.gc.ca
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cosmetics>

Or contact your Regional Product Safety Office at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/cps/contact.htm>

For more information on regulated products under the Food and Drug Act go to:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/food-aliment/friia-raaii/food_drugs-aliments_drogues/act-loi/e_index.htm

For more information on Drug Identification Numbers see:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/tpd-dpt/fact_din_e.html

For additional information on Natural Health Products go to:
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/nhpd-dpsn/index_e.html

Additional It's Your Health articles can be found at:
www.healthcanada.ca/iyh
You can also call (613) 957-2991