



COSMETIC PRODUCTS INGREDIENT LABELLING

The Issue

By November 2006, the outer label of cosmetic products sold in Canada will have to list all the ingredients in the product. This will help consumers make more informed choices. It will also reduce health risks related to the use of cosmetics.

Background

A cosmetic is defined as a substance or mixture of substances manufactured, sold or represented for use in cleansing, improving or altering your complexion, skin, hair or teeth. This includes beauty preparations (make-up, perfume, skin cream, nail polish) and grooming aids (toothpaste, soap, shampoo, shaving cream, deodorant).

Canadians spend an estimated \$5.3 billion on cosmetics each year. Most men, women and children in Canada use cosmetic products on a regular basis. These products are sometimes used over large areas of the body (e.g., the use of soap), and for extended periods of time. There are more than 10,000 different ingredients that may be found in the cosmetics that Canadians use.

Health Canada has a mandate to protect the health and safety of Canadians by minimizing risks related to the use of cosmetics marketed in Canada. As part of this mandate, Health Canada has set out new requirements for cosmetic labelling, to be phased in over a two-year period.

By November 18, 2006, the outer label of all cosmetics sold in Canada must contain a list of all ingredients. In addition, the list must use recognized names from the International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI) system, as found in the International Cosmetic Ingredient Dictionary and Handbook. This naming system is already in

use in the United States, the European Union, Japan and many other countries.

The Health Risks of Cosmetics

Most cosmetics do not pose a health risk when the directions on the label are followed and when the product is used properly. However, some of the ingredients in cosmetics can cause adverse effects in certain individuals with sensitivities. These effects range from mild irritations to severe allergic reactions.

An estimated 2 to 5 per cent of adults may experience mild reactions to the chemicals in cosmetics. The most common reaction is a skin rash. When this happens, most individuals simply stop using the product and the condition clears up on its own.

However, a small percentage of individuals have more serious reactions that may result in a reduced quality of life, loss of income or school-time, increased health risks and increased demands on the health system. Examples of such adverse reactions to cosmetics include painful eye irritations, swelling of the face, and hair loss. In rare instances, individuals with a severe allergy to an ingredient may develop breathing problems. Also, some cosmetics may be toxic to children if swallowed.

Health Canada receives more than 50 reports per year about adverse reactions to cosmetics. Many more cases go unreported.



How Ingredient Labelling for Cosmetics Reduces Risks

With the new labelling requirements, you will have ready access to a list of all ingredients in every cosmetic product. Also, a specific ingredient will have the same name in every product list. This will help reduce risks in the following ways:

- If you know you are sensitive to a substance, you can make an informed choice to avoid any product with that ingredient.
- If you develop a reaction to a product, the list of ingredients will help your health care provider determine the cause. You can then avoid products containing that ingredient in the future.
- Medical professionals will be able to refer to an ingredient by one common name for incident reporting and treatment.
- A product ingredient list can help in emergency situations. For example, if a child swallows a cosmetic product, the list will save time in determining the correct medical treatment.

Minimizing Your Risk

Many manufacturers already list ingredients on the labels of cosmetic products. Read these lists so you can make informed decisions about the cosmetics you use. The following steps will also help minimize your risk related to the use of 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. With hair dye, it is important to do the test each time you use it, even if you have not had a problem before.

- Do not share cosmetics, especially make-up. This could expose you to someone else's bacteria.
- Keep cosmetic products and toiletries out of the reach of children. If a child swallows any of these products, contact the Poison Control Centre nearest you. This is 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 Office. (See below for contact information)

Health Canada's Role

Health Canada defines and communicates requirements concerning the manufacturing, labelling, distribution and sale of cosmetic products in Canada. 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 and do not pose health risks when used as directed.

Need More Info?

For more information, contact:

Cosmetics Program
Consumer Product Safety Bureau
123 Slater Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9
Telephone: (613) 946-6452
Facsimile: (613) 952-3039
Email: CPS-SPC@hc-sc.gc.ca

To report an adverse reaction to a cosmetic product, contact your nearest Regional Product Safety Office at :

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/home-accueil/contact/hecs-dgsesc/psp-bsp_nrc-rcn_e.html

For more tips about the safe use of cosmetics, see *Cosmetics and Your Health*
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/prod/cosmet_e.html

or visit Health Canada's Cosmetic Program Web site at:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/branch-dirgen/hecs-dgsesc/psp-bsp/cosmet/index_e.html

For additional articles on health and safety issues go to the *It's Your Health* Web site at:
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh
You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709
or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*