

# Investigation Shows That Beauty Products Marketed Towards African Americans Pose More Health Risks

Tatiana Bido , Special Projects Editor | December 06, 2016

For African American women, the beauty options available that cater to their particular hair, makeup and skin care needs are limited. Despite the growing number of beauty brands and companies that market personal care products specifically to millions of Americans with darker skin tones (African Americans make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population), the beauty industry still has a long way to go. Now, a new study has found that African American beauty consumers have more to worry about than just a lack of options.

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According to research released by the Environmental Working Group, ingredients found in one of every 12 beauty products marketed to African American women were deemed “highly hazardous” and may be harmful to their health. The organization examined more than 1,100 beauty products marketed to black women and found that one in 12 contained ingredients linked to potential health risks like reproductive issues, hormone disruption, allergies and cancer.

Less than 25 percent of the products made and marketed for African American women were scored by the organization as “low hazard,” which was an alarmingly low number compared to the 40 percent of products marketed to the general public. The worst offenders on the list were hair relaxers, bleaching products and hair dyes. Many lipsticks, concealers, foundations and sun-protective makeup were also scored as “high hazard.”

Because of the lack of options in personal care products, researchers believe that black women are more likely to be exposed to these harmful chemicals. “If a black woman is choosing products marketed to their demographic, they have fewer healthier options,” said Nneka Leiba, deputy director of research for the EWG. For instance, formaldehyde is a cancer causing chemical and can be found in products for all markets, but more so in products created for women of color. “There are formaldehyde releasers in hair dyes,” Leiba said, but “there are less products without them [for African American women].”

Popular brands included in the report include Shea Moisture, IMAN Cosmetics, L’Oréal, CoverGirl and Miss Jessie’s. The group’s entire report, which contains the full list of products details the safety and potential harms of the ingredients, can be found [here](#).

<http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/site/about.php#2>

## Hair | Dry Hair

### These Common Hair Products Contain Toxins That Can Seriously Damage the Body

Julie Ricevuto , Digital Beauty Editor | May 15, 2018

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It seems that every other day there’s a new warning for consumers about toxic beauty products being sold on the market, and today appears to be no different. A recent study

has revealed that hair products predominantly used by black women and children contain hazardous chemicals, *Reuters reports*.

Researchers conducting the study tested 18 different hair products—including hot-oil treatments, relaxers and conditioners—and found potentially harmful chemicals called endocrine disruptors in every product examined. These chemicals can interfere with the body’s hormone balance, leading to possible reproductive disorders, asthma or even cancer in those exposed.

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Of the 66 **endocrine disruptors** sought after within the products, as many as four to 30 disruptors were found in each of the tested hair products. Even worse, two products specifically created for children were discovered to contain the largest levels of banned chemicals, lead author Jessica Helm, a research fellow at the Silent Spring Institute in Newton, Massachusetts, told *Reuters*.

Researchers are speculating that these endocrine disruptors found in the everyday products could be a reason why African-American women enter puberty at an earlier age than other demographics. It could also provide proof for why **African-American** women tend to have higher rates of asthma and reproductive diseases as well.

“It’s widely known the U.S. is doing an inadequate job of testing and regulating chemicals,” Helm explained, noting that many cosmetic companies exclude chemicals from product labels if the ingredients can be categorized as a fragrance or if the company can prove it’s a “secret” component of the formula. In fact, it was reported that 84 percent of the chemicals discovered in the hair products examined in this study were *not* disclosed on **product labels**, proving just how obscure ingredient lists really are. But by omitting harmful chemicals from product labels, the United States protects and promotes the companies’ best interest over the consumers’ health, which is obviously a major issue for shoppers.

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Unfortunately, this isn’t the first time African-American beauty products have come under fire for being detrimental to customers. In 2016, **a study found** that one of every 12 beauty products marketed to African-American women were deemed “highly hazardous.” Yet, there’s still not a lot of research done on the topic and there’s currently a lack of natural, organic beauty product options geared towards African-Americans on the market. Ultimately, this study is yet another example of why the U.S. need to crack down on harmful ingredients used in the cosmetics industry. After all, 11 of the products examined in this research contained chemicals that are prohibited in the European Union, so why should they be allowed in products sold in the United States? Ultimately, it's our citizen's lives at stake, and that shouldn't be a risk cosmetic companies are allowed to take.

One in 12 beauty and personal care products marketed to African-American women in the US contains highly hazardous ingredients, according to research released Tuesday by the Environmental Working Group.

The organization analyzed more than 1,100 products marketed to black women -- people who identify as African-American as well as those from the Caribbean and other areas -- and found that less than a quarter scored "low" on its hazard scale.

By contrast, 40% of products that are marketed to the general public are classified as low-risk.

**The report said the worst products were hair relaxers, hair colors and bleaching products, which studies have linked to potential health harm.**

**Ingredients have been tied to hazards including risk of cancer, hormone disruption, developmental and reproductive damage, and allergies.**

"If a black woman is choosing products marketed to their demographic, they have fewer healthier options," said Nneka Leiba, deputy director of research at the Environmental Working Group, a Washington-based nonprofit research organization.

For example, **"there are formaldehyde releasers in hair dyes,"** Leiba said. Formaldehyde, a known cancer-causing agent, is present in products across the entire beauty market, but "there are less products without them" for black women, she said.

This analysis is the first to assess products tailored to this demographic for their risks and dangers to consumer health. The products, and their ratings, have been added to the group's Skin Deep database, a searchable database providing information on the safety and potential harms of more than 64,000 cosmetic products.

The idea was to give people a place to go to be informed about the products they're using.

"We saw there was a deficit associated with African-American women," Leiba said, adding that as consumers, this demographic makes up a significant proportion of consumers of personal care products. The report says **African-Americans account for as much as 22% of the market for personal care products**, but until now, information on the hazards associated with the products they buy was inadequate.

"We received emails asking for products targeting black women" to be included, said Paul Pestano, senior database analyst and co-author of the report. For example, "studies that have been done on relaxers are small studies."

The most recent analysis involved 1,177 products such as deodorants, bar soaps, makeup, hair products, sunscreens and moisturizers. Some men's and baby products were also included, such as baby lotions, styling gels and shaving creams.

**None of the hair relaxers, hair colors, bleaching products, lipsticks, concealers, foundations or sun-protective makeup products included in the new analysis were classified as "low hazard"** on the Environmental Working Group scale, which runs from 1 (low) to 10 (high) based on factors such as ingredients and evidence base for their harm.

The researchers hope the people buying these products will use the findings to use the Skin Deep database to learn about products before buying them.

"What you choose to bring into your home is a very personal choice," Leiba said, adding that **the goal is not to dictate what people should and shouldn't buy but to help them perceive their risk.** "You can still relax your hair (if you want), but maybe then avoid use of your lipstick if it scores badly."

Since data began to emerge on the risks associated with hair relaxers, many women have veered away from them. But both Leiba and Pestano add that just because a product may label itself as a "natural" alternative, that doesn't mean it is risk-free.

"We don't want people to assume that because they are choosing a natural product that they are not choosing harmful products," Leiba said.

**Some relaxers may not contain caustic ingredients, for example, but they may have fragrances or preservatives -- such as parabens -- that can be harmful. Parabens are potential hormone disruptors, their risk increasing with accumulated use.**

**Some concealers and foundations were also found to have retinyl palmitate, a form of vitamin A that has been linked to skin cancer,** according to the group.

Most cosmetics and ingredients don't need approval from the US Food and Drug Administration before they go on the market.

Products "must be safe for consumers under labeled or customary conditions of use, and they must be properly labeled," the agency said. "Companies and individuals who manufacture or market cosmetics have a legal responsibility to ensure the safety of their products. However, the law does not require cosmetic companies to share their safety information, including adverse events."

Leiba believes that informed consumers can in turn push companies to re-evaluate their products and make them more

consumer-friendly.

"This report will help push the companies that make these products marketed to black women," she said. "We want to empower all demographics."

"It's an interesting piece of research which further emphasizes the need for phasing in safer chemical substances in cosmetics, particularly for sub-populations who might be making greater use of problematic compounds," said Paul Whaley, an environmental scientist at the University of Lancaster in the UK, who was not involved with the study.

"It is good to see EWG reinforcing this point; hopefully, this will lead to more research into safer alternatives, acceleration of phase-out of hazardous substances and also closer regulatory scrutiny of what chemicals should be permitted in cosmetics in the first place."

