



CONSUMER INFORMATION

PPD IN “BLACK HENNA” TEMPORARY TATTOOS IS NOT SAFE

The Issue

“Black henna” temporary tattoos are often sold and applied by artisans at markets, fairs and amusement parks in Canada and holiday or foreign travel destinations. Natural henna is red-brown in colour and is safe to use directly on skin, whereas “black henna” is produced when a colourant is added to natural henna. Some colourants are safe to add, but others, such as para-phenylenediamine (PPD), are not. PPD may be added to “black henna” ink by mixing it with hair dye. In some cases, hair dye is applied directly to the skin instead of a henna paste.

The use of PPD in cosmetics that are applied directly to the skin (such as temporary tattoos) can cause serious allergic reactions and poses a risk to the health and safety of the user. Therefore, cosmetics containing PPD that are applied directly to the skin are banned from sale in Canada. PPD is an acceptable ingredient for use in hair dyes that are rinsed off after a maximum of 30 minutes. When used correctly, hair dye does not come directly into contact with skin for prolonged periods of time.

Allergic reactions to PPD include red skin rashes, itching, blisters, open sores, and scarring within 2 to 10 days following application. These allergic reactions may also lead to sensitivities to other products such as hair dye, sun block and some types of clothing dyes .

What you can do

Before receiving a temporary tattoo, ask the vendor to confirm that PPD or hair dye was not added to the ink or paste. Health Canada permits the use of natural henna and other safe dyes in cosmetics. Cosmetic products sold in Canada must have ingredient labels. Ask the vendor to see the ingredient label for the ink or paste. If there is no label, do not get a tattoo.

The following are some indicators that an ink or paste being used for “black henna” temporary tattoos may contain PPD:

- If the formula and resulting tattoo are intense black;
- If the tattoo ink sets very quickly. Natural henna paste must set for 24 - 48 hours to completely darken;

- If the temporary tattoo lasts one to three weeks, without fading; and,
- If the ink or paste has very little or no scent (natural henna usually smells like soil, hay, or added essential oils).

Note that even brown shades of ink/paste may contain PPD in order to make the temporary tattoo darker or last longer.

Please contact your nearest Health Canada Product Safety Office if you suspect that PPD is being used by a local vendor, or if you suspect you have suffered an adverse reaction from a “black henna” temporary tattoo. Call toll-free 1-866-662-0666 or send an email to cosmetics@hc-sc.gc.ca.