Many Products for Black Women Contain Unsafe Ingredients

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Everyone should be concerned about what's inside the products they use on their bodies, but Black women must be especially vigilant. According to recent findings by the Environmental Working Group (EWG), up to one in 12 products marketed to African-American women, as compared with those sold to the general population, contain highly hazardous ingredients, CNN.com reports.

For the study, one of the first of its kind, the research and advocacy organization reviewed more than 1,100 products marketed to Black women—individuals who identified as African American and those from the Caribbean and other areas. Research samples included deodorants, bar soaps, makeup, hair products, sunscreens, moisturizers, styling gels, shaving creams and baby lotions.

Scientists specifically targeted chemical substances—parabens, fragrances, formaldehyde, retinyl palmitate and more—that recent studies have linked to cancer risk, hormone disruption, developmental and reproductive damage, and allergies. Then researchers rated each beauty product on a so-called hazard scale. Rankings ranged from 1 (low) to 10 (high) based on factors such as ingredients and evidence confirming that the substance was harmful.

The report found that less than a quarter of personal care products marketed to Black women scored low on this scale. Not a single hair relaxer, hair color, bleach product, lipstick, concealer, foundation or sun-protective makeup product on the list was considered safe. Fifteen of the hair relaxers examined scored an average of 8.1 on the scale, which placed them firmly in the range of products to be avoided whenever possible.

"If a Black woman is choosing products marketed to their demographic, they have fewer healthier options," said Nneka Leiba, deputy director of the Environmental Working Group. By contrast, study authors noted that 40 percent of beauty products marketed to the general public were classified as low risk. "This report will help push the companies that make these products marketed to Black women. We want to empower all demographics."

Interested in learning which beauty products in your home aren't likely to cause harm? The safety profile of every product tested can be found in the EWG's Skin Deep database, which provides information on more than 64,000 cosmetic products.

Click here to learn more about the health risks young girls face when exposed to certain chemicals found in common beauty products.

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