
HAIR COLOR PRODUCTS

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WHAT IS A HAIR COLORANT?

Hair colorants are basic ingredients, natural or chemical, which induce coloration of the hair. Hair coloring is an age-old procedure that was already used by the ancient Egyptians, who employed henna. Depending on the result expected by the consumer, various types of hair color products may be used either directly by the consumer or applied by a professional in a hairdressing salon. Coloration may be the classic permanent oxidative coloration, permanent tone on tone coloration, or temporary or semi-permanent coloration. Permanent oxidative coloration combines various hair colorants, an oxidizing agent, generally hydrogen peroxide, and an alkaline agent (ammonium hydroxide or monoethanolamine).

L'Oréal invented the first oxidative hair color product for hairdressers in 1909 and remains a world leader in the field of innovation with the assistance of the largest hair research center worldwide, for which coloration is one of the priorities.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS?

Hair color products and hair dyes were the subject of considerable controversy some 10 years ago. The products were suspected of inducing an increase in the frequency of certain forms of cancer. The controversy led to numerous international scientific committees reviewing all the existing data and concluding that there was no such risk for consumers. Like very many consumer products, such as certain foods, medications and cosmetics, hair color products may induce allergic reactions. However, those reactions are very rare and in general not serious (almost exclusively contact dermatitis) and in general confined to the scalp and totally reversible on discontinuation of product use. The reactions are mainly due to the presence of certain oxidative colorants indispensable for product performance.

WHY CAN OUR HAIR COLORANTS BE USED IN ALL SAFETY?

Hair colorants are certainly among the ingredients that have been the most scrupulously studied with regard to human health and are highly regulated. All the hair colorants have been reviewed and their concentrations for use redefined by the European Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety over the last decade. Our hair coloration products contain colorants that have obtained regulatory approval and para-phenylenediamine (PPD) concentrations that are at least 2 times less than the maximum concentration authorized in Europe. Our products also have precautions for use and specific safety labeling in order to inform consumers that rare cases of allergic reaction may occur and that a skin allergy test is to be conducted 48 hours before applying the hair color product. The labeling also informs consumers that the risk of allergy increases after having undergone temporary tattooing with black henna containing PPD. Very clearly, the data generated by our cosmetic safety monitoring program show that the maximum frequency of non-serious cutaneous irritation and allergies is about 1 case for every million oxidative hair color product marketed. This finding is to be viewed in the light of severe food allergies: approximately 50 to 300 cases per million subjects. Our hair color products are thus not associated with any risk for consumer health under normal conditions of use.

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