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Halloween Face Paints Contain Lead, Heavy Metals Linked to Skin Allergies

Parents should consider safer alternatives for kids' costumes

San Francisco – New product tests reveal that some children's face paints contain lead, which can impact brain development at extremely low doses, as well as nickel, cobalt and chromium, which can cause lifelong skin sensitization and contact dermatitis. Because these metals are not listed on product labels, parents shopping for Halloween make-up have no way of knowing which products are safe. While this is particularly concerning for parents at this time of year, these products are used year-round for dress-up and play, and the lack of cosmetic safety standards is a problem that extends to all cosmetics sold in the United States.

The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, a national coalition of nonprofit health and environmental groups, sent 10 children's face paints to an independent lab to test for heavy metals, and also reviewed ingredient labels of Halloween products sold at a seasonal holiday store. The findings, compiled in the new report, "Pretty Scary," include:

- Ten out of 10 children's face paints contained lead at levels ranging from 0.05 to 0.65 parts per million (ppm).
- Six out of 10 children's face paints contained the potent skin allergens nickel, cobalt and/or chromium at levels ranging from 1.6 to 120 ppm – far exceeding industry safety recommendations of 1 ppm.
- Snazaroo Face Paint, labeled as "non-toxic" and "hypoallergenic," contained some of the highest levels of lead, nickel and cobalt found in the study.

"Lead and other hazardous chemicals have no place in face paints kids use for dress-up and play on Halloween or any other day of the year," said Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-III.). "Strengthening our cosmetics laws and providing ample resources are essential to ensure the FDA has the authority and tools it needs to protect the health of our children from chemicals in cosmetics."

"Lead is dangerous to the developing brains of children at any level. It is now widely accepted in the scientific community that there is no threshold level below which lead is safe," said Phil Landrigan, M.D., Director, Children's Environmental Health Center Mount Sinai School of Medicine. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that parents avoid using cosmetics on their children that could be contaminated with lead.

"Nickel, cobalt and chromium are top allergens in children. To have these contaminants in face paints is concerning because early-life exposures increase the chance that kids will have lifelong sensitization and develop contact dermatitis on the face," said Bruce A. Brod, M.D., Clinical Associate Professor of Dermatology at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

None of the four heavy metals found in the face paints was listed on product labels because they are

contaminants and thus are exempt from labeling laws.

The report also found many hazardous ingredients listed on the labels of Halloween hair-color sprays and make-up products, including butane (persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic), thiram (neurotoxic, possibly carcinogenic, used as a pesticide), alumina (neurotoxic), propylene glycol (possibly carcinogenic) and pigment green 7 and pigment blue 15, which are not approved by FDA for use in cosmetics.

"Parents should not have to worry that face paint contains lead and other hazardous substances. Companies are not making the safest products possible for children, even though kids are particularly vulnerable to toxic exposures," said Lisa Archer, national coordinator of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics at the Breast Cancer Fund.

"Parents are stunned when they learn that these products made for kids have lead and other toxics in them. We don't understand how our government is so lax, nor why the manufacturers are so negligent," said Joan Blades, co-founder of Moms Rising, a national advocacy organization focused on family health and economic security.

In the meantime, here are some tips for a safer Halloween: Choose costumes without face paint or masks (which can also be toxic and may impede vision and breathing), or make your own face paint from natural products and ingredients. See www.safecosmetics.org/recipes#halloween for recipes.

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Founding members of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics include Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, Breast Cancer Fund, Clean Water Fund, Commonweal, Environmental Working Group, Friends of the Earth, Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition, National Black Environmental Justice Network, National Environmental Trust and Women's Voices for the Earth. www.SafeCosmetics.org