



Black women are often surprised to learn that it's perfectly legal for companies to use ingredients linked to cancer, hormone disruption, and reproductive harm in the hair relaxers, nail products and other beauty and personal care products they use every day. The good news is that Black-owned businesses are leading the way by making safer products, specially designed for Black women, and Black consumers are advocating for change.



Black women are disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals in the



workplace, in communities, and from beauty and personal care products. In fact, beauty products marketed to Black women and girls often contain the most toxic ingredients found in cosmetic products, including chemicals linked to breast and ovarian cancer, uterine fibroids, fertility issues and other reproductive harm, endocrine disruption, and more. This toxic exposure is of particular concern to Black women because they purchase and use more beauty products per capita than any other demographic spending more than \$7.5 billion on beauty products a year and nine times more on hair products than the average consumer. So, Black women buy more beauty products – and the products they use are more toxic – resulting in a disproportionately higher level of exposure to harmful ingredients because of the products marketed to them.



In their landmark publication, Drs. Ami Zota and Bhavna Shamasunder were the first to frame the disproportionate exposure of Black women to toxic chemicals in beauty products as an environmental justice concern. They argued that elevated exposures to beauty product chemicals in women of



color are, in part, attributable to the "environmental injustice of beauty"—a framework that links intersectional systems of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, classism) to Eurocentric beauty norms (e.g. societal preferences for light skin and straight hair) and racialized beauty practices, all of which can have long term consequences on both women's chemical exposures and their health and wellbeing.

Scientific studies show that Black women have higher levels of beauty product-related environmental chemicals in their bodies and that exposure to even small amounts of toxic chemicals over time can trigger adverse health consequences. The association of hair dye use with breast cancer was first demonstrated by the Women's Circle of Health Study and replicated in the Sisters Study, which found higher rates of breast cancer among Black women associated with the use of hair straighteners and permanent hair dye. This study found Black women who regularly use darker and permanent hair dyes face a **60% increased risk of breast cancer** compared to an **8% increased risk for White women**. And Black women who use chemical hair straighteners had a **30% higher risk of breast cancer** than White women.



But breast cancer is just the tip of the iceberg. In fact, the ingredients in personal care and beauty products have been associated with a whole host of other adverse health impacts experienced by Black women and girls. For



example, ingredients in hair care and personal care products such as phthalates, heavy metals, and polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) have been associated with earlier puberty among girls. Heavy metals, such as cadmium and lead, are found in many cosmetic products used by Black women such as lipsticks, eyeliners, eyeshadows, foundations, and more. These metals have been linked to higher instances of uterine fibroids. In

addition, exposure to toluene, benzene and xylene in personal care products and cosmetics used by Black women have also been associated with negative reproductive outcomes including toxic effects on developing fetuses.

### No Federal Regulation of Cosmetic Safety

Over 10,000 ingredients are used to formulate cosmetic products, and many of them are linked to harm to human health and the environment, yet the \$100 billion cosmetics industry is only regulated by 2.5 pages of federal law that

hasn't been updated in over 80 years. This lack of oversight and accountability especially harms Black women and girls. As the Black beauty industry grows, the fact that the ingredients in Black beauty and personal care products are not adequately tested for safety, and are largely unregulated, raises real concerns for Black women's health.



# "Scientific studies show that Black women have higher levels of beauty productrelated environmental chemicals in their bodies!"



#### But there is the good news

The Black beauty market is evolving, increasing the availability of safer products for Black women and girls. Black-owned businesses are leading the way, and the conventional beauty industry is listening to Black women – and their buying power. Black women are demanding the safer, cleaner, non-toxic products they deserve to decrease their exposures to unsafe chemicals and increase their likelihood of better health.



Now you can shop for non-toxic Black beauty products by patronizing the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics' new list of <u>Top Non-Toxic Black-owned Beauty</u>



Brands which features companies that are creating safer beauty products, free of toxic ingredients linked to health concerns that disproportionately impact Black women. Created as a sortable <u>database of</u> <u>products</u> that Black women can use to find safer products they can trust— this project was specifically designed to get non-toxic beauty products into the hands of Black women and girls.

#### We all deserve a government that protects us

In an ideal world, we would all have the time and resources to research and afford non-toxic beauty and personal care products. But at the end of the day, we all deserve a government that protects us from toxic chemicals in the cosmetic products we use every day. Support the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics efforts to secure federal cosmetic safety policy reform so everyone is protected, regardless of where they live, shop, or work. <u>Click here</u> to learn more and take action.

## For a full list of scientific papers cited in this fact sheet, visit: www.safecosmetics.org/black-beauty-project/

