

Use Eye Cosmetics Safely



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The volunteer organization Prevent Blindness America has designated April as Women’s Eye Health and Safety Month—a good time to brush up on safe and hygienic ways to store, apply, wear, and remove eye cosmetics.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates all cosmetics marketed in the United States, including mascara, eye shadows, eye liner, concealers, and eyebrow pencils.

Safety experts within the Office of Cosmetics and Colors in FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) offer consumers the following advice:

Keep everything clean.

Dangerous bacteria or fungi can grow in some cosmetic products, as well as their containers. Cleanliness can help prevent eye infections.

Always wash your hands before applying eye cosmetics, and be sure that any instrument you place near your eyes is clean. Be especially care-

ful not to contaminate cosmetics by introducing microorganisms. For example, don’t lay an eyelash wand on a countertop where it can pick up bacteria. Keep containers clean, since these may also be a source of contamination.

Don’t moisten cosmetic products.

Don’t add saliva or water to moisten eye cosmetics. Doing so can introduce bacteria. Problems can arise if you overpower a product’s preservative capability.

Don’t share or swap.

People can be harmed by others’ germs when they share eye makeup. Keep this in mind when you come across “testers” at retail stores. If you

do sample cosmetics at a store, be sure to use single-use applicators, such as clean cotton swabs.

Don’t apply or remove eye makeup in a moving vehicle.

Any bump or sudden stop can cause injury to your eye with a mascara wand or other applicator.

Check ingredients, including color additives.

As with any cosmetic product sold to consumers, eye cosmetics are required to have an ingredient declaration on the label. If they don’t, they are considered misbranded and illegal.

In the United States, the use of color additives is strictly regulated. Some color additives approved for cosmetic

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use in general are not approved for areas near the eyes.

If the product is properly labeled, you can check to see whether the color additives declared on the label are in FDA's List of Color Additives Approved for Use in Cosmetics. (Under "For More Information" below, see "Color Additives Approved for Use in Cosmetics" and "FDA's Import Alert for Cosmetics Containing Illegal Colors.")

Use only cosmetics intended for the eyes on the eyes.

Don't use a lip liner as an eye liner, for example. You may expose eyes either to contamination from your mouth or to color additives that are not approved for use near the eyes.

Say "no" to kohl!

Also known as al-kahl, kajal, or surma, kohl is used in some parts of the world for enhancing the appearance of the eyes. But kohl is unapproved for cosmetic use in the United States.

Kohl contains salts of heavy metals such as antimony and lead. Reports have linked the use of kohl to lead poisoning in children.

Some eye cosmetics may be labeled with the word "kohl" only to indicate the shade, not because they contain true kohl.

A product's "ingredient statement" should not list kohl—this is not an FDA-approved color additive. Check the ingredient statement to make sure that kohl is not present.

Don't dye eyelashes and eyebrows.

No color additives are approved by FDA for permanent dyeing or tinting of eyelashes and eyebrows. Perma-

nent eyelash and eyebrow tints and dyes have been known to cause serious eye injuries.

Use care with false eyelashes or extensions.

False eyelashes and extensions, as well as their adhesives, must meet the safety and labeling requirements for cosmetics. Since the eyelids are delicate, an allergic reaction, irritation, or injury in the eye area can occur. Check the ingredients to make sure you are not allergic to the adhesives.

Don't use eye cosmetics that cause irritation.

Stop using a product immediately if irritation occurs. See a doctor if irritation persists.

Avoid using eye cosmetics if you have an eye infection.

Discard any eye cosmetics you were using when you got the infection. Also, don't use eye cosmetics if the skin around the eye is inflamed.

Don't use old eye cosmetics.

Manufacturers usually recommend discarding mascara two to four months after purchase. Discard dried-up mascara.

Don't store cosmetics at temperatures above 85° F.

Preservatives that keep bacteria or fungi from growing can lose their effectiveness, for example, in cosmetics kept for long periods in hot cars.

REPORT PROBLEMS

If you need to contact FDA concerning an eye cosmetic product problem, go to the "How to Report" page on FDA's

MedWatch Web site at www.fda.gov/medwatch and use form FDA 3500. You can also find contact information for an FDA office near you at www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/district.html. 

This article appears on FDA's Consumer Health Information Web page (www.fda.gov/consumer), which features the latest updates on FDA-regulated products. Sign up for free e-mail subscriptions at www.fda.gov/consumer/consumerenews.html.

For More Information

CFSAN: Eye Cosmetic Safety
www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/coseye2.html

Color Additives Approved for Use in Cosmetics
www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/opa-col2.html#table3A

FDA's Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA): Import Alert for Cosmetics Containing Illegal Colors
www.fda.gov/ora/fiars/ora_import_ia5306.html

ORA: Import Alert for Eyelash and Eyebrow Dyes Containing Coal Tar
www.fda.gov/ora/fiars/ora_import_ia5304.html