

Hair colorants

The hair dye PPD (paraphenylenediamine or p-phenylenediamine) is most often associated with allergic reactions to hair colorants.

PPD is used in permanent hair colours, including eyelash and eyebrow colouring products. It is needed for almost all shades, but especially the darker shades.

These products contain a PPD-type hair dye because they are the best way to achieve permanent hair colour and they are the only way of successfully colouring grey hair.

All cosmetic products must carry a list of ingredients on-pack. When a hair colorant contains PPD, or a related hair dye, the product also has to be labelled with 'contains phenylenediamines' or 'contains phenylenediamines (toluenediamines)'.

There is a legal requirement for cosmetic products and their ingredients to be strictly assessed for safety by an independent assessor before they can go on the market. The use of PPD is therefore strictly regulated and it is only approved for use in hair colorants. It is approved by the 28 EU member states and the USA.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO CARRY OUT ALLERGY ALERT TESTS

While the vast majority of people who have their hair coloured experience no problems at all, it is known that a small number of people do have the potential to become allergic to some ingredients in hair colorants.

It is possible to develop an allergy to PPD and similar products over time, without realising. So even if clients have used hair colours before, whether done at home or applied professionally, they can develop an allergic reaction that they may not have had in the past.

These cases are rare but an Allergy Alert Test is an important precaution and indicates that the client may have a reaction if you go on to colour their hair.

ANNUAL ALLERGY ALERT TESTING

Since an allergy can take time to develop, an Allergy Alert Test must be carried out annually and a record must be kept.

TATTOOS

PPD is sometimes used illegally in so-called 'black henna' temporary tattoos. This can lead to a strong reaction to otherwise safe products such as hair colorants which also contain PPD. This is why the card includes questions about 'black henna' temporary tattoos as they can increase the allergy risk, even if the client did not experience any reaction at the time, and some years after they have been applied.

Certain substances found in some skin permanent or other temporary tattoos, and also possibly permanent make-up, may cause an allergic reaction. This could put your client at an increased risk of a reaction when they have a hair colour. Therefore you need to check that it is safe to proceed by carrying out the Allergy Alert Test prior to colouring.

UNDER 16s

You will start to see all permanent hair colours carrying the warning that they are not intended for use on children under the age of 16. This is not because of any safety issue, but is to help ensure that children do not use these products as they might not pay attention to the warnings and instructions for use. This is particularly important for home kits. If you apply colour using products which state 'not intended for use on children under the age of 16' this is contrary to the manufacturer's instructions which would invalidate your insurance.

BRAND AND PRODUCTS

'Brand' means the manufacturer and 'brand product range' means individual ranges of colouring products from that specific manufacturer.

Different brands or brand product ranges may contain different ingredients. That's why it's important to do an Allergy Alert Test each time your client changes to a different brand or brand product range.

AFTER 12 MONTHS

If it has been more than 12 months since you last did an Allergy Alert Test on a client, even if your client has not changed brand, product range or colour, you must still do a test. You cannot use a colour application as a substitute for doing an Allergy Alert Test. You should explain that you're

doing a test for their own protection – many clients are completely unaware that allergies can build up over time. It also ensures that you are complying with manufacturer's instructions and insurance requirements.

TESTING

The Allergy Alert Test must be done 2 days (48 hours) before the colour is applied because it can take up to 48 hours for an allergic reaction to develop. If you cut corners, you risk missing a reaction.

If you know which brand and shade you will be applying you should use this to carry out the Allergy Alert Test. If you do not know which shade you will be applying, you should choose the darkest shade from the chosen brand product range (where 'brand' means the manufacturer and 'brand product range' means individual ranges of colouring products from that specific manufacturer). Remember, different brand product ranges may contain different ingredients which is why it is important to test each time your client changes to a different brand product range.

Always follow the manufacturers' instructions when carrying out the Allergy Alert Test, which means you will usually be using the specific brand product range.

REACTIONS

Remember if you react to the Allergy Alert Test (such as reddening, itching or swelling in or around the test area), **do not go on to colour the hair.** Contact the manufacturer and recommend that your client seeks medical advice before any further colour applications are made.

DOES THE TEST HAVE TO BE DONE EXACTLY 48 HOURS IN ADVANCE?

It must be done at least 48 hours in advance. The test can be done up to a maximum of 5 days in advance so, for example if a customer has a test on Friday but can't come back into the salon until Tuesday, that's fine - as long as they have not had additional colour treatments, tattoos or permanent make-up or a reaction to the Allergy Alert Test in the meantime.

CAN HAIR DYE CAUSE CANCER?

Hair colorants have been extensively assessed for safety and scientific bodies regularly review scientific studies on hair colorants and no link has been found between the use of hair colorants and any type of cancer.

CUSTOMER IS PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING?

It is perfectly safe to colour hair if a customer is pregnant or breastfeeding – just ask the questions on the card, as you would normally would, to decide whether or not you need to do an Allergy Alert Test. As always, if you are not sure then do an Allergy Alert Test following manufacturers' instructions. However, some women can be extremely concerned about colouring their hair at this time and for them it is better to avoid the source of anxiety and not have their hair coloured even though there are no safety concerns from the colouring itself.