



# Chemical Hair Relaxers/Straighteners/Blow Outs

## HOW CAN CHEMICALS IN HAIR RELAXERS, STRAIGHTENERS, AND BLOW OUTS GET INTO YOUR BODY?

### Skin and Eye Contact

- Some chemicals may harm your skin directly and/or be absorbed into your bloodstream.
- You may splash chemicals into your eyes.
- You may accidentally touch your eyes with chemicals on your hands.
- Chemical vapors in the air may get into your eyes.

### Breathing

- You may breathe in chemical vapors through your nose or mouth.

### Swallowing

- Chemicals on your hands or in the air may contaminate your food or drink.

## HOW CAN CHEMICALS IN HAIR RELAXERS, STRAIGHTENERS AND BLOW OUTS AFFECT YOUR BODY?

Different chemicals affect your body in different ways, depending on the *amount* of the chemical in the product, how *harmful* it is, the *length of time* you are exposed, and other factors. Not every person has the same reaction to a chemical. Some people experience health effects when they work with a product, others never do. Health problems that may be caused by chemicals in relaxers, straighteners or blow outs include:

**Central nervous system effects:** Headache, dizziness, nausea, drowsiness, restlessness.

**Nose and throat irritation:** Runny nose, scratchy throat, burning, itching.

**Skin irritation and dermatitis:** Redness, itching, skin rash, or dry skin that cracks and flakes — most common on the hands and arms.

**Allergies:** Stuffy or runny nose, sneezing, asthma, dermatitis. If you become sensitive to a particular chemical, you will have an allergic reaction every time you use it.

**Eye irritation:** Redness, burning, watering, itching.

**Lung irritation:** Breathing difficulty, shortness of breath, coughing, swelling of lung tissue.

**Burns:** Chemicals in some hair relaxers and straightening products can cause burns if they get on your skin or in your eyes.

### What harmful chemicals are sometimes found in chemical hair relaxers, straighteners and blow outs?

#### WARNING! EXPOSURE TO THESE CHEMICALS MAY CAUSE:

**Alcohol (isopropyl):** Eye, nose, throat, and lung irritation. Central nervous system effects. Skin irritation and dermatitis.

**Ammonium hydroxide:** Eye, nose, throat, and lung irritation. Skin and eye burns. Skin irritation and dermatitis.

**Ammonium thioglycolate or glycerol monothioglycolate:** Eye, nose, throat, and lung irritation. Skin irritation and dermatitis. Allergies, including asthma. (Ammonium thioglycolate is less likely to cause some of these symptoms.)

**Boric acid, perborate, or borate:** Central nervous system effects. Kidney damage if swallowed.

**Bromates:** Eye, nose, and throat irritation. Central nervous system effects. Skin and eye burns. Skin irritation and dermatitis. Severe irritation of mouth, throat, and stomach if swallowed. Kidney damage if swallowed.

**Guanidine carbonate:** Skin irritation and dermatitis. Skin and eye burns.

**Hydrogen peroxide:** Eye, nose, throat, and lung irritation. Skin and eye burns. Severe irritation of mouth, throat, and stomach if swallowed.

**Sodium hydroxide:** Eye, nose, throat, and lung irritation. Skin and eye burns. Skin irritation and dermatitis. Severe irritation of mouth, throat, and stomach if swallowed.

**Formaldehyde (methylene glycol):** Eye, nose, throat irritation, lung cancer, blindness, asthma, skin rashes. Note: The following chemicals are treated as formaldehyde under OSHA's Formaldehyde standard – formalin, methylene oxide, paraform, formic aldehyde, methanol, oxomethane, oxymethylene.

Not all hair relaxers, straighteners and blow outs contain these chemicals, and some may contain harmful chemicals not listed above. Always check the product's Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for more information.

### HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF FROM CHEMICAL HAZARDS?

When you work around chemicals in hair relaxers and straighteners, it is important to take steps to protect your health.

#### **Avoid harmful chemicals**

- For any product used, read the label and Safety Data Sheet to know what is in the product and its health effects.
- Use products that contain bisulfites instead of sodium hydroxide or thioglycolates.
- Use ammonium thioglycolate instead of glycerol monothioglycolate.
- Use products with the least harmful chemicals in them when possible.

#### **Use safe work practices**

- Use a heat pressing method for straightening hair instead of chemicals.
- Keep containers closed when you're not using them so the product doesn't spill or get into the air.
- Check that all containers of chemicals are properly labeled of their contents.
- Don't eat or drink in your work area as your food or drink may get contaminated.
- Wash your hands after working with chemicals, even if you wore gloves.

#### **Ventilate the room**

- Always work in a well-ventilated area. If there's no ventilation system, open windows and doors to bring in fresh air from outside.

#### **Use protective equipment**

- Wear gloves designed to protect your skin from the particular chemicals you're using.
- Wear safety goggles when mixing chemicals to protect your eyes from splashes.

#### **Know your rights as a worker**

- Employers must provide workers with Safety Data Sheets if requested.
- Employers must train workers on the hazards of the chemicals they are working with and how to protect themselves from the hazards.

#### **Report any health problems**

- Speak up if you are experiencing symptoms of health effects so your employer can help alleviate the problem and let other employees know.
- Seek advice from your doctor on how serious your issues are and how they should be handled.
- You have the right to report health hazards to Cal/OSHA by filing a complaint.

