The Environmental Injustice of Beauty: Understanding the links between beauty products and health among women of color

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There are an enormous number of unregulated chemicals in our products and in our bodies.
Beauty products contain multiple chemicals that can harm health.

**Chemicals of Concern**
- Formaldehyde
- Phthalates
- Parabens
- Lead
- Mercury
- Triclosan
- Benzophenone

**Potential Health Effects**
- Endocrine disruption
- Cancer
- Reproductive harm
- Asthma/allergy
- Neurodevelopmental harm in children exposed early in life
Why?

• The laws safeguarding the health and safety of personal care products is outdated and ineffective.
• Under current law, the FDA lacks the authority to review ingredients in personal care products to determine whether they are safe.
• In the United States, only 11 substances are banned or restricted from use in these products.
• As a result, US companies that market personal care products largely determine their own safety standards.
• Companies do not have to disclose all the ingredients in products
Phthalates

Manmade chemicals used in **100s** of everyday products; make plastics **flexible**

- Disrupt hormone signaling systems
- Strong evidence of **reproductive toxicity** in male and female animals
- In humans, phthalates associated with increased risk of infertility, pregnancy complications, and male reproductive tract development.
- Suspected to play a role in obesity and other metabolic diseases.

Zota et al. 2018; Swan et al. 2015; Srilanchakon et al. 2017; Zota et al. 2014; Lyche et al. 2009
Phthalates enter our bodies through multiple routes:

- Through the air
- Hand to mouth behavior
- Through our skin
Black women are more highly exposed to beauty-product related chemicals

Reproductive-aged women (n=739), NHANES 2001-2004

Branch et al. Environ Health 2015
Structural Racism

- Policies/Dress Codes
- Targeted Advertising
- Cultural Norms
- Peer Pressure

Internalized Racism

Beauty Rituals

Zota and Shamasunder, AJOG 2018
Environmental Injustice of Beauty

Racialized Beauty Norms → Beauty Product Chemicals → Adverse Health Outcomes

Zota and Shamasunder, AJOG 2018
### Environmental Injustice of Beauty Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racialized Beauty Norm</th>
<th>Vulnerable pop.</th>
<th>Product use</th>
<th>Chemical exposures</th>
<th>Potential adverse outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorism</td>
<td>Dark skinned women</td>
<td><img src="product_image.png" alt="Product Image" /></td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>Mercury poisoning, neurotoxicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair texture preferences</td>
<td>African American women</td>
<td><img src="product_image.png" alt="Product Image" /></td>
<td>Parabens, phthalates, siloxanes</td>
<td>Uterine fibroids, breast cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural norms about odor</td>
<td>African American women</td>
<td><img src="product_image.png" alt="Product Image" /></td>
<td>Phthalates, talc powder</td>
<td>Gynecologic cancers, endocrine disruption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Zota and Shamasunder, AJOG 2018
Women of color often live in polluted neighborhoods.
Women of color often work with hazardous chemicals
Policy Interventions Work

Change in Phthalate Levels in the U.S. Population
After Legislative Bans and Market-Based Campaigns to
Remove Phthalates from Certain Products

Banned Phthalates

Pthalates Targeted
in Marketing Campaigns

Pthalates NOT Banned
(Replacements)

SOURCE: Zota, Calafat & Woodruff EHP 2014
Thank you!!

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