

Chemical Safety in Hairdressing

Information Sheet

This information sheet has been developed to provide practical advice for employers and employees exposed to chemical products in the hairdressing industry.



It is estimated that up to 70% of hairdressers suffer from work related skin damage at some point in their career. Many hairdressers, particularly trainees, spend a lot of time with their hands in water and in contact with shampoo, hair dyes and cleaning products. All of which can lead to skin damage. The skin may become dry, red, sore and even bleed. The skin can also become more sensitive to damage from other chemicals. Most of this damage is preventable.

If you use hair and cleaning products several times each day they can pose a risk to your health. Some of these products are classed as cosmetics, which are used to beautify or cleanse. Some are classed as chemicals such as cleaning and disinfecting products. As a professional user, you will use these products more often than a person at home so it is important your workplace exposure is assessed.



What type of health effects can occur when using some hairdressing products?

Allergic reactions: The most frequent occupational illnesses related to chemical exposure for hairdressers are allergy related, namely dermatitis which affects the skin and asthma which affects the lungs. Many products that hairdressers use, several times a day, have the potential to cause dermatitis and allergic reactions. Once an allergic reaction develops to a particular chemical you will become allergic to it for life, both in and outside the workplace. An example would be an allergic reaction to paraphenylenediamine (PPD) which is found in many permanent and some semi-permanent hair dyes.

Some temporary henna tattoos use PPD in large amounts and this can lead to an increased chance of developing an allergic reaction. A severe reaction could result in anaphylaxis which can lead to death. Persulphates used in hair



bleaches and hair lighteners can cause allergic reactions to the hairdressers skin and breathing in these products can cause irritation to the airways resulting in conditions such as asthma or rhinitis.

Tips to protect you and your employees from chemical exposures

Tips for chemical safety

- Make a list (inventory) of all hairdressing products and other products such as sterilising fluid and cleaning products.
- Consult your supplier or the manufacturer for further information, which may include safety data sheets (SDSs). Note cosmetic products are not required to have SDSs by law but chemical products must have one.
- Observe any warning labels and instructions for safe use on the product container, packaging or leaflet.
- Consider the use of safer products, such as less toxic products or products in a less hazardous form for the workers. An example would be using a non-dusty form of persulphates to prevent workers breathing it in.
- Know the safe way to handle the products and what precautions to take before using any products. Always follow the manufacturers' instructions for use. Make sure everyone in the workplace gets this information.
- Always wear the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) advised by the manufacturer - this may include gloves and eye protection.
- Remember some products are flammable - avoid tea lights and candles.

- Clean up spills straight away.
- Always put the cap back on containers straight away after use.
- Store products in a dry, cool, dark place in as small a quantity as possible.
- Keep all products off your hands. Wear gloves routinely for washing hair, colouring, bleaching and all cleaning tasks. The ideal gloves should be powder-free, non-latex, 300mm in length and be provided in different sizes to ensure they fit individual workers.
- Keep food and drink away from chemicals and don't eat or drink in the vicinity of chemicals.
- Ensure that there is as much natural ventilation as possible - make sure windows and doors are opened. When ventilation in a salon is not sufficient, the airborne chemicals and dusts can accumulate in the air and can be inhaled in significant quantities.
- Ensure that the product mixing area is well ventilated.
- Be careful where you buy your hair dyes from, especially if sourcing from outside Europe, as the products may not meet the safety standards for hair dyes allowed to be sold in the European Union. Check the website www.hpra.ie which advises on the legal obligations for sale and distribution of cosmetic products in Ireland.

Hand Care

- Keep all products off your hands. Wear gloves routinely for washing hair, colouring, bleaching and all cleaning tasks. The ideal gloves should be powder-free, non-latex, 300mm in length and be provided in different sizes to ensure they fit individual workers.
- Dry hands thoroughly with a disposable towel. Moisturise hands with a perfume free product as often as possible.
- Distribute the wet work evenly among employees to reduce the individual's exposure to wet work.
- Do not wear jewellery on hands or arms.
- Know the signs of dermatitis and check your hands regularly for signs. Get medical advice if you show signs of dermatitis. See <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/az/c/contact-dermatitis/>
- Use disposable gloves and throw them away after each use. Avoid latex gloves if possible due to the risk of an allergic reaction. If you must use them, use a low protein and powder free version of the gloves.

Further information

Further information is available to download for free from the Health and Safety Authority website at www.hsa.ie.



- Ensure you have a Safety Statement. It is a legal requirement to prepare a Safety Statement which is a written action programme for safeguarding the health and safety of those at work. This document must be based on the risk assessment of hazards in the workplace.
- There are three steps to risk assessment: (1) identify the hazards (2) assess the risk and (3) put control measures in place. The free online tool from the Health and Safety Authority will help you do this, see www.BESMART.ie.
- Use our BeSMART Top Tips information sheets on Chemical Safety https://besmart.ie/fs/doc/Chemicals_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- Check out our chemicals webpages at http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Your_Industry/Chemicals/
- Contact us at chemicals@hsa.ie if you have any specific queries about chemicals. Contact the Health and Safety Authority at wcu@hsa.ie or **LoCall 1890 289 389** for general health and safety queries.
- Contact the Health Protection Regulatory Authority (HPRA) who oversee the selling and distribution of cosmetic products in Ireland www.hpra.ie

Other guidance material

- www.safehair.ie
- www.coiffure.eu/ - this is a European framework agreement from employers on the protection of occupational health & safety in the hairdressing sector.
- www.irishhairfed.ie - The Irish Hairdressers Federation (IHF) is a member of coiffure.eu
- European Agency for Safety and Health at Work 'Occupational Health and Safety in the Hairdressing Sector. <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/e-facts/efact34> (Risk assessment for Hairdressers)
- www.ctpa.org.uk 'A Guide to the Health & Safety of Salon Hair Products. This document is to be used with the product lists issued by manufacturers which specify the section in the booklet to which each of their products is included. Note this is a British document and the legislation quoted is not Irish.
- <http://www.hse.gov.uk/hairdressing/index.htm> 'Hairdressing safety including the bad hand day campaign. This document is a British document from the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) the legislation quoted is not Irish but gives general guidance.

Further Information and Guidance:

Visit our website at www.hsa.ie, telephone our contact centre on **1890 289 389** or email wcu@hsa.ie

Use BeSMART, our free online risk assessment tool at www.besmart.ie

Check out our range of free online courses at www.hslearning.ie

