

Formaldehyde in hair straighteners prompts FDA warning

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You might decide your natural locks aren't so bad after all, given a new warning from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that most hair straightening/smoothing products release formaldehyde gas, a human carcinogen.

Being exposed to formaldehyde for longer periods of time and at higher concentrations increases the health risks, according to the FDA.

Formaldehyde exposure can cause a host of complaints, including [eye problems](#) or irritation; nervous system problems such as headaches and dizziness; and respiratory problems such as sore or scratchy throat, cough or wheezing. Nausea, [chest pain](#), vomiting and rashes are also associated with [formaldehyde exposure](#).

Long-term effects can include chronic headaches, asthma, [contact dermatitis](#) (a red, itchy rash) and possibly cancer, the FDA noted in a news release.

Some people are highly sensitive to the colorless

gas, while others have no reaction to the same level of exposure. If you're sensitive to formaldehyde, don't use hair straighteners, the FDA cautioned.

If you want to use hair straighteners, use a licensed hair professional who is trained to take precautions. These include wearing gloves and safety glasses, and working in a salon with proper ventilation. If there is poor or no ventilation, you're at risk of inhaling formaldehyde that's released when the product is heated.

It's also a good idea to question the stylist. Find out if the product contains formaldehyde, ask if you could see its ingredient list and Safety Data Sheet, and ask if there are alternative products that don't release formaldehyde.

The FDA doesn't recommend buying hair straightener from a store or online to apply yourself. But if you're determined to do so, read the required list of ingredients on the packaging or website. If there isn't a list, don't buy the product.

If formaldehyde, formalin or methylene glycol are listed as ingredients, it means the product contains formaldehyde or will release formaldehyde. Not all hair smoothing products contain formaldehyde, which is why you need to read the ingredients list, the FDA noted.

More information: The American Cancer Society has more on [formaldehyde](#).

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