

Talc in Cosmetics & Consumer Products

This fact sheet answers some questions about talc, an ingredient used in many cosmetics, such as baby powder and blush. DPH has received questions about the safety of talc and whether it may contain harmful contaminants, such as asbestos.

WHAT IS TALC?

Talc is a naturally-occurring mineral used in some consumer products, including personal care products like cosmetics. Pure talc and talc-containing rock are mined from the earth. Talc is made up of magnesium, silicon, oxygen and hydrogen. Its physical properties make it one of the softest naturally occurring minerals. There are different grades of talc, with varying degrees of purity (or presence of other minerals). Talc is milled to different particle sizes, with the finest talc used in cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and some food products.

WHAT TYPES OF PRODUCTS MAY CONTAIN TALC?

Talc may be used in products to absorb moisture, prevent caking, improve consistency, or to make a product opaque. Talc is an ingredient used in personal care products such as loose powders (e.g., talcum powder, baby powder, blush, eyeshadow), and in other forms (e.g., pressed powder, liquid makeup). It is also used in some food items, such as rice and chewing gum, and to manufacture pill tablets. Talc may also be used during athletic or other activities (e.g. drumming).

DOES TALC CONTAIN ASBESTOS?

If talc mining sites are not selected carefully, talc may be contaminated with asbestos. Unlike talc, however, exposure to the mineral asbestos is known to cause cancers in and

around the lungs. Specific processing techniques and careful selection of mining sites are ways to prevent contamination of talc with asbestos.



IS THERE A CONCERN ABOUT TALC AND CANCER?

Starting in the 1960s some health studies began to suggest a possible association between the use of powders containing talc and the incidence of ovarian cancer. While studies conducted over the past 60 years have raised similar concerns, a specific link has not been established.

HOW IS THE SAFETY OF COSMETICS MONITORED?

While cosmetics do not undergo federal government review or approval prior to sale, manufacturers are legally responsible for the safety and proper labeling of product ingredients. Federal regulators monitor for potential problems and take action when scientific data shows harm when a product is being used as intended.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO INVESTIGATE ASBESTOS IN TALC-CONTAINING PRODUCTS?

In response to safety questions raised about the use of powders containing talc and the possible association with the incidence of ovarian cancer, federal regulators conducted exploratory testing for asbestos in cosmetic products. The testing included analysis of 34 cosmetic products containing talc (e.g. eye shadow, blush, foundation, face and body powder). Although limited by the number of products tested, the survey results found no asbestos in any cosmetic samples. Recently, however, there was a recall of a brand of cosmetics due to asbestos contamination.

ARE THERE WAYS TO MINIMIZE EXPOSURE TO TALC?

Federal regulators monitor for new information when potential public health concerns about talc are raised. In the meantime, consumers concerned about the safety of talc-containing products and possible exposure to asbestos may choose to avoid, limit use, or try an alternative (e.g. cornstarch-based powder). To determine if a product contains talc, the product label can be checked for the following ingredients – talc, talcum powder, and/or magnesium silicate.

DO PEDIATRICIANS HAVE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT USING TALC?

The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend the use of baby or talcum powder on babies because inhalation may lead to breathing problems. Parents with questions about use of baby powder on babies should consult with their pediatrician.



WHO CAN I CONTACT TO LEARN MORE?

Staff at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Environmental Health are available to answer your questions. Contact us at 617-624-5757 (TTY: 617-624-5286) or visit us at:

www.mass.gov/dph/environmental_health

For more information about federal actions related to talc-containing products, contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration at 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332) or visit:

<https://www.fda.gov/cosmetics/productsingredients/ingredients/ucm293184.htm>

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