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Phenoxyethanol

Phenoxyethanol is used as a preservative in cosmetic products and also as a stabilizer in perfumes and soaps. [1] Exposure to phenoxyethanol has been linked to reactions ranging from eczema [2] to severe, life-threatening allergic reactions. [3] Infant oral exposure to phenoxyethanol can acutely affect nervous system function. [4]



WHAT IS PHENOXYETHANOL?

Phenoxyethanol is used as a preservative in cosmetic products to limit bacterial growth. A review of 43 cosmetic products demonstrated that only 25 percent of the products had concentrations of phenoxyethanol greater than 0.6 percent and the mean concentration of phenoxyethanol was 0.46 percent. [5] Phenoxyethanol is also used as to stabilize components found in perfumes and soaps. [6]

Found In

- Moisturizer
- Eye shadow
- Foundation
- Sunscreen
- Conditioner
- Mascara
- Eye liner
- Shampoo
- Lip gloss
- Concealer
- Body wash
- Hand cream
- Blush
- Hair color
- Hair spray
- Lip balm
- Lotion
- Nail polish
- Baby wipes,
- Baby lotions and soaps
- Soap (liquid and bar)
- Shaving cream
- Deodorant
- Toothpaste
- Fragrance
- Hair removal waxes
- Hand sanitizer
- Ultrasound gel

What to look for on the label

- Phenoxyethanol
- 2-Phenoxyethanol
- Euxyl K® 400 (mixture of Phenoxyethanol and 1,2-dibromo-2,4-dicyanobutane)
- PhE

Health Concerns

Allergen: Skin exposure to phenoxyethanol has been linked to allergic reactions ranging from eczema and hives [7] to anaphylaxis. A 2015 study found that Doppler ultrasound gel mostly caused skin inflammation, but there were rare reports of anaphylaxis, or life-threatening reactions. Mixtures of phenoxyethanol and parabens found in Doppler ultrasound gel may lead to more severe allergic reactions than phenoxyethanol alone.

Eczema is also a common allergic reaction to skin exposure of products containing one percent or more phenoxyethanol. Reactions only occur in the area of application and eczema subsides after avoidance of the product causing irritation. [10]

Acute nervous system effects (infants): In 2008, the FDA warned consumers not to purchase Mommy's Bliss Nipple Cream. Phenoxyethanol, found in the cream, was depressing the central nervous system and causing vomiting and diarrhea in breast feeding infants. [11] Symptoms of a depressed nervous system include a decrease in infant's appetite, difficulty waking the infant, limpness of extremities and change in skin color. There is no known health risk to the mother. [12]

Vulnerable Populations

Babies & Children (https://www.safecosmetics.org/population/babies-children/)

Regulations

The European Economic Community (EEC) Cosmetics Derivative [13] and the Cosmetics Regulation of the European Union approved phenoxyethanol in concentrations up to one percent.[14]

How to Avoid?

Infants should not be exposed to cosmetic products containing Phenoxyethanol. If you are allergic, read labels and avoid personal care products and vaccines with phenoxyethanol and since parabens may enhance the allergic effects of phenoxyethanol, skip products containing both chemicals. If you are not allergic, phenoxyethanol is a relatively safe preservative in regard to chronic health effects.

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