

# Hair Dye and Hair Relaxers

Hair dye is used to color your hair. Hair relaxers are used to make your hair straight. Both hair dye and hair relaxers can hurt your skin, hair, and eyes, especially if you are not careful.

## Hair dyes

- There are different types of hair dyes used in salons and sold in stores. For example, some are permanent and cannot be washed out with shampoo. Others wash out after a number of shampoos. The number of shampoos varies, depending on the product. Check the label to see about how long you can expect these colors to last.

Other kinds of dye:

- **Progressive** hair dyes change the color of your hair gradually. They make hair a little darker each time you use them.
- **Henna** is made from a plant and colors hair red or reddish brown.

**No matter what kind of hair dye you use, follow directions carefully. Pay attention to all “Caution” or “Warning” statements.**

## What problems can hair dyes cause?

Some of the problems people have had from using hair dyes are:

- Itchy or raw skin
- Swelling in the face
- Trouble breathing
- Hair loss
- Redness
- Burning

## How can I use hair dye safely?

- Follow the directions in the package. Pay attention to all “Caution” and “Warning” statements.
- Do a patch test before using dye on your hair. Here’s how: Rub a tiny bit of the dye on the inside of your elbow or behind your ear. Leave it there for two days. If you get a rash, don’t use the dye on your hair. You should do the test each time you dye your hair. (Salons should also do the patch test before dyeing your hair.)
- Never dye your eyebrows or eyelashes. This can hurt your eyes. You might even go blind. FDA **does not** allow using hair dyes on eyelashes and eyebrows.
- Keep hair dyes out of the reach of children.
- Don’t leave the dye on longer than the directions say you should.
- Rinse your scalp well with water after dyeing.
- Wear gloves when you apply the hair dye.
- Never mix different hair dye products. This can hurt your hair and scalp.

## Should I color my eyebrows or eyelashes?

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## Hair relaxers

### Are “no-lye” hair relaxers safer?

- Any relaxer can burn your scalp if you use it the wrong way.
- Lye is something found in many hair relaxers. It helps the product work, but it can also burn the skin.
- Relaxers without lye don't usually bother your skin as much, but you still need to be safe and use them the right way.

### Tips from skin doctors and hairdressers to help use hair relaxers safely:

- Don't leave the relaxer on longer than the directions say you should.
- Wash it out with a neutralizing shampoo. (You can get neutralizing shampoo in most places where you buy shampoo.)
- Use conditioner often after relaxing your hair.
- Be extra careful when you use hair relaxers on children. Keep hair relaxers out of children's reach. Children have been hurt playing with hair relaxers.
- It can be a good idea to get help with relaxers instead of doing it all by yourself. That way you can be surer to use the relaxer evenly and rinse it all out from places you can't see.
- You can protect your scalp by putting petroleum jelly on the scalp before using the relaxer.
- Don't scratch your head or brush your hair before you use a relaxer.

- Remember that curling and blow drying can hurt your hair, too.

### How often should I relax my hair?

- Straightening too often can damage your hair. You might want to ask your hairdresser for advice, because different products on the market have different directions. According to some hairdressers, every six to eight weeks is common, but this depends on the product.
- It also depends on your hair, such as how fast your hair grows.

### Can I dye and relax my hair at the same time?

- You are more likely to damage your hair if you use both hair dye and a relaxer.
- If you do color your relaxed hair, some hairdressers say you should use a semi-permanent dye. They say it will cause less damage than a permanent dye.
- Refer to product directions and talk to your hairdresser because different relaxers have different directions. Some should not be used when you have dye in your hair.

### How should I report a bad reaction or a complaint about a hair dye?

Contact FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) Adverse Events Reporting System (CAERS):

- Call 1-800-FDA-1088
- Email [CAERS@cfsan.fda.gov](mailto:CAERS@cfsan.fda.gov)

FDA Office of Women's Health <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition  
[www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/cos-toc.html](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/cos-toc.html)