

Lead in Lipstick?

Read what Dr. Landrigan, who conducted the original research on lead toxicity, says about a new FDA study.

Last week, the media highlighted a federal analysis revealing that approximately 400 shades of popular lipsticks contained trace amounts of lead. Of the top ten most toxic lipsticks, five were made by L'Oreal and Maybelline, both owned by L'Oreal; two were made by Cover Girl and two were made by NARS. With popular brands topping this list, many media outlets have picked up the story, asking both cosmetic manufacturers and federal regulators, how safe are our lipsticks?



What is lead? Lead -- a proven neurotoxin -- is a heavy metal known to be harmful to the developing brain, even when exposures are too low to cause obvious signs and symptoms.

Once commonly used in paint and gasoline, lead was banned from these products in 1978 -- after groundbreaking research by CEHC's Dr. Philip J. Landrigan mandated the removal of this toxic chemical. Over 30 years later, this discovery has produced a 95% decline in childhood lead poisoning, increased the average IQ by six points, and saved the U.S. government \$200 billion each year.

What did the FDA find? In this new federal study, released by the FDA at the end of 2011, the most toxic lipstick was found to contain a lead level of 7.19 parts per million (ppm) -- a significant increase since the last FDA study in 2007. To put this number in context, the current maximum allowable lead level in drinking water is 15 parts per billion (ppb).

While consumer advocate groups argue that no level of lead is safe -- as exposure builds up over time as lipstick is used -- the FDA believes otherwise. "The levels we found are within the limits recommended by other public health authorities for lead in cosmetics," they said.

How can we avoid lead in lipstick? "Research from our Center and from the World Health Organization has shown that even the very smallest amounts of lead can cause brain damage in infants and children," said Dr. Landrigan. For this reason, **Dr. Landrigan strongly recommends that women avoid any lipstick that contains lead.** "A child's vulnerability to lead is greatest in the nine months of pregnancy -- causing damage to the developing brain during the earliest weeks, before a woman is even sure that she is pregnant."

For lead-free alternatives, see the Daily Green's [list of 11 lead-free lipsticks](#).