



THE UGLY SIDE OF BEAUTY

THE LOW-DOWN ON THE RECENT SCARY OF BEAUTY-RELATED HEALTH SCARES

THE DANGER WITHIN

WIN!
REDACTED HAIRCARE SETS WORTH \$1,180
THE BODY SHOP HAIRCARE SETS WORTH \$1,035

BRAZILIAN BLOWOUT
The fears: Last month, the makers of Brazilian Blowout, a popular brand of hair-straightening treatments used in salons, agreed to include a warning label on two of their products which emit formaldehyde gas.

This settlement was reached after a lawsuit between the company and the American state of California. Before this ruling, the manufacturer had claimed that the two products in question – Brazilian Blowout Acai Smoothing Solution and Brazilian Blowout Professional Smoothing Solution – were formaldehyde-free.

However, both products were found to release the gas at concentrations higher than the allowed 0.2 per cent, which is an international standard.

Formaldehyde, which is used in embalming fluid, is classified as a human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

However, only those who are exposed to high concentrations of formaldehyde over an extended length of time, such as embalmers and industrial workers, are likely to suffer from its carcinogenic effects. In fact, it is used in low concentrations of below 0.2 per cent as a preservative in some cosmetic products, including nail polish and eyelash glue.

Complaints about the noxious smell from Brazilian Blowout treatments – as well as hair-straightening treatments from other brands – have been around since 2007, when this type of keratin protein hair-straightening treatment was launched.

Salon workers and customers have reported side effects such as stinging eyes, headaches, rashes, throat irritation, breathing problems, chest pain and vomiting. To date, there has been at least one death linked to this straightening treatment. A housewife in Brazil died after leaving the solution in her hair for four days, probably due to suffocation from the fumes.

It is not known if any salon workers or customers have contracted cancer from exposure to formaldehyde released by the straightening treatments, but this is a long-term effect that may take years to manifest.

The facts: Formaldehyde is a preservative that is permitted in cosmetic products at a concentration of less than 0.2 per cent, says a spokesman for the Health Sciences Authority (HSA).

This is an international guideline that is required by the Asian Cosmetics Directive and the European Cosmetic Directive. It is used to prevent micro-organisms from growing in the products.

Beauty products that adhere to these limits are considered to be safe for use, says Dr Tan Hock Heng, a toxicologist and an emergency physician at Chang General Hospital's accident and emergency department.

The HSA spokesman says Brazilian Blowout's Professional Smoothing Solution has been registered in Singapore and it is currently conducting checks to see if the product exceeds the allowed concentration of formaldehyde. If it is found to flout the guidelines, the HSA will recall it.

Despite the latest ruling in the United States on Brazilian Blowout products, the HSA has not taken action yet as the products available here may be made with different concentrations of formaldehyde that are within the approved limits, the spokesman explains.

The other questionable Brazilian Blowout product, Acai Smoothing Solution, is not sold here.

A quick check found that salons here usually use straightening treatments that do not contain formaldehyde.

Dr Tan says inhaled formaldehyde can cause short-term

eye, nose, throat and skin irritation. "But it rapidly broken down and does not accumulate in the body," he adds.

The symptoms go away after the formaldehyde is broken down. Hence, there is little risk of customers contracting cancer from ad hoc exposure to formaldehyde from hair-straightening products. Those who are at risk are those who are exposed to the chemical over an extended period of time due to work, says Dr Wong Chung Ing, a medical oncologist at The Cancer Centre, a subsidiary of the Singapore Medical Group.

Studies have shown that workers such as embalmers and industrial workers have an increased risk of leukaemia and nasopharyngeal cancer, a cancer of the nasopharynx, the area at the upper part of the throat behind the nose.

What you can do: It is better to err on the side of caution, as there are unpleasant side effects from inhaling formaldehyde fumes, even if they are temporary.

Ask for a formaldehyde-free hair-straightening treatment at the salon.

Even when using hair-straightening products that have formaldehyde levels within the approved limits, you should minimise exposure to the chemical, says Dr Tan. By having the treatment done in a well-ventilated location.

Actress Demi Moore is reportedly a fan of Brazilian Blowout, which makes the hair straight and sleek.



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implants, leading to fear that these implants are linked to cancer – although there is no evidence proving this to date.

There is no official word on the number of ruptured PIP implants, but the British Association of Plastic Surgeons estimates the rupture rate to be one in 10 implants, reports Britain's The Telegraph newspaper.

Last December, the French government advised 30,000 women who had PIP implants to get them removed. This has led to a worldwide scare among an estimated 400,000 women who have received PIP implants.

Health authorities in Germany and the Netherlands also recommended that women with PIP implants get them removed. Other countries, including Brazil, Britain and Mexico, have advised patients to get their implants checked by a doctor and have them removed if a problem.

The facts: Dr Tan Ying Chien, consultant plastic surgeon of The Sloane Clinic Plastic Surgery Centre, says the Scientific Committee of the European Commission released a report on PIP implants earlier this month.

It found that the company probably began using inferior silicone gel in 2005.

According to the report, not only is the inferior-grade gel more likely to become lumpy and granular, causing pain and inflammation, there were also problems found with the implant shell.

Dr Tan explains: "The implant shell of PIP implants is less stable than regular implant shells, thus allowing the gel within the implant to leak into surrounding tissues even if it does not rupture. This can cause inflammation of the surrounding tissues."

"The PIP implant shell is also more susceptible to rupture, which results in leakage of silicone gel," says Professor Tan.

At the head of the reconstructive and aesthetic surgery at the National University Hospital, explains that when implants rupture, the body will react by trying to "encapsulate" the leaked fluid.

"This causes the body to form lumps around the leaked fluid which may harden and are often difficult to distinguish from a cancerous lump," he says.

Not only are the lumps painful, they may also be mistaken for cancer, which could lead to unnecessary stress and anxiety, not to mention the costs of having the lumps examined.

Inferior-quality implants, like those from PIP, may also contain impurities and contaminants such as chemical, oils and heavy metals that can be poisonous to the human body and cause allergic reactions or infections, he adds.

As of now, no links have been found between PIP or other breast implants and cancer.

In Singapore, all breast implants must be registered with the Health Sciences

Authority (HSA) before they can be used here.

PIP implants are not approved for use here, so it is unlikely that they have been used on patients.

However, an earlier Straits Times report found that some plastic surgeons in China and Thailand may have offered PIP implants, so those who have had implants done abroad should check to ensure they are not from PIP.

What you can do: Plastic surgeons advise women who have PIP implants to get them removed as soon as possible to minimise the risk of ruptured breast implants.

Prof Lim says patients can get their plastic surgeons to give them the certification that comes with every implant package as this contains information about the company that made the implant, as well as the serial number and manufacturing date. This will come in handy should the patient need to seek medical advice in future.

There is no health advisory specifically related to PIP implants here, but the HSA advises women with any sort of breast implant to seek medical attention if they are concerned about them.

Some symptoms that may indicate problems with breast implants include pain, lumps, swelling or asymmetry.

Should you decide to go for implants, be sure to consult a qualified plastic surgeon, the only type of specialist approved to perform such a procedure.

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