

Beauty Justice

The Problem for Consumers

Personal care and beauty products sold across the U.S. are subject to very little government oversight — and many have been found to contain toxic ingredients. Without proper laws in place, companies are left to police themselves, and consumers likely have no idea about the potential health harms they're being exposed to. The average American adult uses about 12 personal care products a day resulting in exposure to an average of 168 chemicals. Those products can include toxins like formaldehyde, mercury, asbestos, lead and parabens, which have been linked to cancer, brain damage and reproductive harm.

Earlier this year, CR published results after testing 10 popular synthetic braiding hair brands and found carcinogens in all of the samples, and lead in 9 out of the 10. Women and people of color are disproportionately exposed to more harmful chemicals in their daily personal care products, because of their greater use of these products and targeted marketing efforts.

The Policy Opportunity

Federal and state legislation offers a critical opportunity to modernize cosmetic safety standards and deliver what consumers expect: safer, more transparent, and equitable personal care products.

- **Safer Products:** Legislation at both the federal and state levels—including the Safer Beauty Bill Package introduced in Congress and the Beauty Justice Act in New York State—would ban some of the most hazardous chemicals still found in cosmetics sold in the U.S., such as mercury, parabens, lead, asbestos, and toluene, as well as classes of chemicals like formaldehyde-releasing preservatives and ortho-phthalates. Many of these ingredients are already banned in the European Union and in several U.S. states, but remain legal in products marketed to American consumers. Reducing exposure to these chemicals could help improve health outcomes nationwide.
- **Ingredient Transparency:** The federal Cosmetic Hazardous Ingredient Right to Know Act, one of the four bills in the Safer Beauty Bill Package, would require companies to disclose toxic fragrance and flavor ingredients on product labels and websites. This includes ingredients in both retail cosmetics and professional salon products. Greater transparency will empower consumers to make informed purchasing decisions and reduce their exposure to harmful substances.
- **Equitable Products:** The federal Cosmetic Safety Protections for Communities of Color & Salon Workers Act would fund research, outreach, and safer alternatives to protect groups most impacted by toxic exposure—including women of color and professional salon workers. These populations face higher levels of exposure due to the types of products marketed to them or used in their workplaces. The bill would also require the FDA to regulate synthetic hair products, which are widely used by Black women and have been found to contain hazardous chemicals such as lead and benzene according to a CR investigation.ⁱ

- **Product Innovation:** The same investigation notes that in 2023, the U.S. market for cosmetics marketed toward black women was valued at \$2.79 billion and is expected to reach a value of \$6.34 billion by 2029. The clean cosmetics sector is the fastest-growing segment of the beauty industry, signaling that consumers want safer, non-toxic alternatives. These bills would accelerate innovation by pushing companies to develop high-performance products without harmful ingredients. In New York, dozens of businesses have backed a state bill called the Beauty Justice Act, and nationally, companies like Dr. Bronner's and Innersense Organic Beauty have voiced support for the federal Safer Beauty Bill Package.

Consumer Reports' Positions

CR supports strong state and federal policies to eliminate toxic chemicals from beauty and personal care products and protect public health.

Every day, Americans use products that may contain harmful ingredients linked to cancer, infertility, and developmental harm. Women of color and professional salon workers face even greater risks due to disproportionate exposure. Yet here in the U.S., companies can still use virtually any ingredient in a cosmetic product without FDA pre-market testing or review.ⁱⁱ

CR works with partners and consumers to support state-level action, including the Beauty Justice Act in New York State, which would help drive broader protections. The Beauty Justice Act would be the strongest bill of its kind to protect consumer health—banning the sale and distribution of personal care and cosmetic products containing certain hazardous chemicals like PFAS, formaldehyde, phthalates, and lead. The bill passed the New York State Senate in June 2025, and CR will work to support its full passage when the legislative session resumes in January 2026.

At the federal level, Congress made some progress with the 2022 Modernization of Cosmetics Regulation Act (MoCRA), but the law fell short on ingredient safety and transparency—issues consumers care about most. CR supports the recently reintroduced Safer Beauty Bill Package—a set of four federal bills that would ban the most toxic chemicals still allowed in beauty and personal care products, improve ingredient and supply chain transparency, and prioritize health protections for the most at-risk populations including women of color and salon workers.

For more information on our work on Beauty Justice, please contact Meg Bohne at meg.bohne@consumer.org and Alexandra Grose at alexandra.grose@consumer.org.

ⁱ Consumer Reports, "Dangerous Chemicals Were Detected in 100% of the Braiding Hair We Tested", 2025. Available: <https://www.consumerreports.org/health/wigs-hair-extensions/dangerous-chemicals-detected-in-braiding-hair-cr-tested-a4850978424/>

ⁱⁱBreast Cancer Prevention Partners, Landmark Safer Beauty Bill Package to Address Dangerous Gaps in Cosmetic Safety, available: <https://www.bcpp.org/landmark-safer-beauty-bill-package-to-address-dangerous-gaps-in-cosmetic-safety/>

About Consumer Reports

Founded in 1936, CR is on a mission to create a fair and just marketplace for all. Widely known for our rigorous research and testing of products and services, we also survey millions of consumers each year, report extensively on marketplace issues, and advocate for consumer rights and protections around safety, digital rights, financial fairness, and sustainability. CR is independent and nonprofit.