

Safer Beauty and Personal Care

The Problem for Consumers

Personal care and beauty products sold in the U.S. historically have been subject to little regulatory oversight, leaving millions of consumers at risk of direct exposure to chemicals that can threaten their health. While a new federal law took effect in 2023, it leaves broad safety gaps that states may be able to address.¹

The average American adult uses about 12 personal care products a day and is exposed to an average of 112 unique chemical ingredients, some of which may be linked to health harms like an increased risk of cancer, brain damage, and disruptions to the reproductive and development systems.² Some products may contain heavy metals, volatile organic chemicals (VOCs), formaldehyde, or parabens, for example.

In 2025 and 2026, CR published two investigations on braiding hair—including synthetic and human-derived products—and found concerning levels of lead, carcinogens, and VOCs in nearly every product tested, including products marketed as “non-toxic.”³ In 2026, CR also tested 23 popular at-home hair dye products and found that many products contained detectable levels of chemicals with known health harms, including methylene chloride, benzene, and phthalates.⁴

The Policy Opportunity

States have the opportunity to go beyond current federal rules by advancing legislation to ensure safer products and greater ingredient transparency.

Already, several states have taken important steps to address harmful chemicals in personal care and beauty products:

- **Banning Specific Chemicals in Products:** California, Maryland, and Washington have passed laws banning certain intentionally added toxic chemicals

¹ Breast Cancer Prevention Partners, “Big Federal Cosmetic Policy Reform Enacted” (Jan. 2023) www.bcpp.org/cosmetic-policy-reform-enacted.

² Environmental Working Group, “Survey finds use of personal care products up since 2004 – what that means for your health” (July 2023) www.ewg.org/research/survey-finds-use-personal-care-products-2004-what-means-your-health.

³ Consumer Reports, “We Found Heavy Metals and VOCs in CR’s Follow-Up Braiding Hair Investigation” (Feb. 2026) www.consumerreports.org/health/wigs-hair-extensions/braiding-hair-heavy-metals-vocs-follow-up-test-a9549045438; CR, “Dangerous Chemicals Were Detected in 100% of the Braiding Hair We Tested” (Feb. 2025) www.consumerreports.org/health/wigs-hair-extensions/dangerous-chemicals-detected-in-braiding-hair-cr-tested-a4850978424.

⁴ CR, “Some Boxed Hair Dyes Contain Fewer Toxins Than Others” (Apr. 2026) www.consumerreports.org/health/hair-color-dyes/hair-dye-tests-heavy-metals-vocs-phthalates-a1078498826.

from personal care and cosmetic products. More than a dozen states, including New York and New Jersey, have introduced legislation that 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. CR supported New York's legislation, the Beauty Justice Act, in the 2025-26 legislative session.

- **Ingredient Transparency:** In addition to banning toxic chemicals from personal care and beauty products, CR supports state efforts to require companies to fully disclose product ingredients to consumers. Full transparency empowers consumers to make informed purchasing decisions and reduce their exposure to potentially harmful substances. States, including California and Oregon, have passed laws or introduced legislation requiring companies to disclose all chemical ingredients intentionally added to personal care and beauty products to the public.

Consumer Reports' Positions

- CR supports the passage of state laws that would protect public health by eliminating toxic chemicals from beauty and personal care products, and empower consumers by providing full ingredient transparency.

What's Next

- Support the introduction and passage of state legislation to ensure safer personal care and beauty products, and empower consumers with ingredient information.
- Continue CR's independent testing and investigations to identify possible toxic chemicals in personal care and beauty products, and engage consumers, policymakers, and companies regarding our findings.

For more information on our work on Safer Beauty and Personal Care, please contact Oriene Shin at oriene.shin@consumer.org.

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.