

## Deadly Lipsticks?

The email started off on a friendly note, advising women to exercise caution.

It states that some lipsticks contain lead.

The e-mail that was mass-circulated, then went on to disclose that the reason why one common brand had drastically reduced its price was because the lipstick contain lead.

It then named 10 other renowned brands of lipsticks and lip gloss commonly used by women here.

The e-mail warned women to be wary of brands that claim that their lipstick stays on longer.

It says that's because these lipsticks contain a higher lead content.

The e mail has startled those who have received it.

21 year-old student, Chong Li Fen is now more cautious.

**“The email more or less have effect on people reading the email so basically in that case, I'd stop using that particular brand of lipstick for a while. Probably choose other brands. Better play safe. It's better to be safe than sorry.**

But how true is this information?

A question, I put to the President of the Cosmetic, Toiletries and Fragrance Association of Singapore, Dr Alain Khaiat

**"It's totally untrue. The lipsticks are made with colors and lead is toxic. It's not allowed in cosmetics. The pigments are checked, the colors are checked when bought by the companies. There's a maximum specification for lead content which is 20 ppm. Meaning, an extremely extremely low concentration allowed. Most of the pigment contain 0 and even if they were at the maximum level allowed, when the lipstick is made, the concentration of this pigment is very small. So the actual concentration in the lipstick would be under 0 and basically they don't contain any lead. Lead is not allowed and the Ministry of Health in many countries do pick up samples and do the analysis. And to my knowledge in the last 20 over years in this field, I'm not aware of the major companies that have been found to be not in agreement with the regulations. They have a reputation to protect and this email list a number of some of the**

**biggest companies and many of them I know very well and I can guarantee that they wouldn't allow any lead in any components that they're using."**

The National University of Singapore's Dr Bob Stanforth of the Department of Chemical and Environmental Engineering, pointed out the dangers of lead, if consumed.

**"Lead is a very toxic element, it's particularly dangerous for young children and at low doses it causes learning disabilities and some behavioral problems. The kids are just more violent, less socially adaptable. And they also learn more slowly. At higher concentration, it can cause nerve effects. For adults, you get same sort of effects like slower learning abilities, decreased mental capabilities etc."**

Dr Stanforth disputed the e-mail's suggestion of how the consumer can test for lead in lipsticks.

**"They were suggesting that you take a gold ring and scratch the lipstick and if the lipstick color changes to black, you'll know that the lipstick contains lead. It's not obvious how that method works as far as I know. It just won't do anything. Lead is a very inert metal and it's not going to cause any change in the lipstick or in the lead in the lipstick if it were there. In order to find out, you'd have to take a sample of the lipstick, you'd have to digest it in the laboratory to turn it into a solution, analyze the solution on an instrument that picks up on heavy metals. Same sort of instrument that we use to analyze the metal in the drinking water. And there you can find out whether the lipstick has lead in it and how much. The gold ring test isn't going to work."**

President of the Cosmetic, Toiletries and Fragrance Association of Singapore, Dr Alain Khaiat assured consumers that the lipsticks sold here are safe enough even for consumption.

As such even if women tend to consume some inadvertently when they lick their lips or when they are having a meal there are no harmful effects.

**"The companies have to give the Ministry a list of ingredients contained in the lipstick as well as the color ingredient they may contain. There's a regulation on which color is allowed and which color is not allowed and lead as an ingredient is not allowed. Many of the ingredients, all the ingredients have been tested, the toxicity is well known. Lipstick is a mixture of oils and waxes and these waxes are food-grade, these oil are food grade. There's no problem of the amount of the product applied on the lips. Even if you were to eat the whole lipstick, you wouldn't have any problem. There's a lot of information floating around about products that are safe or unsafe. I think the general**

**public should be rest assured that the cosmetic products they have and using are safe and we're working in very close relations with the Health Sciences Authority in Singapore to make sure that this happens.”**

Dr Khaiat said consumers who are concerned about the safety of cosmetic products can always write to the company you bought the products from or write to the Health Sciences Authority.

If you have a story to share, call my Consumer Watch Hotline at 6-251-2003.

*(This story was first broadcast on November 4, 2003)*