

Teenagers' favourite lipsticks are 'laced with toxic metals': Popular colours and glosses 'contain substances linked to cancer'

- **Women are exposing themselves to potentially dangerous levels of chromium**
- **The chemical can cause lung cancer and has been linked to stomach cancer**

By [Fiona Macrae](#)

A new study has found that some lipsticks contain potentially dangerous levels of chromium

Many popular lipsticks and glosses are laced with toxic metals, a study found. Use of some of the cosmetics could lead to girls and women unwittingly exposing themselves to potentially dangerous levels of chromium – a chemical that can cause lung cancer and has been linked to stomach cancer. The researchers also warned those who frequently applied some of colours and glosses could take in 'troubling' amounts of aluminium and manganese.

Some studies have linked aluminium to Alzheimer's disease, while there are concerns that manganese can cause mood swings and problems with memory and co-ordination.

The 32 products tested were bought in the US and chosen because they were popular with teenage girls. The brands have not been disclosed but they are described as being 'very common' and widely available in chemists and department stores.

The cheapest cost £3.50 and the most expensive £15.50. The trade body for the cosmetics industry in the UK said that EU laws prohibit the inclusion of many of these chemicals.

However, red and green dyes based on chromium are permitted. The study's authors said that their results shouldn't be a great cause for alarm amongst women and girls. However, they should act as a wake-up call for health regulators. The researchers, from the University of California, Berkeley, began by asking a group of girls and young women which lipsticks and glosses they had in their bags and which were in their bathrooms at home. The researchers then bought the products and analysed their chemical content.

They then factored in whether the levels found were enough to cause a concern to health. They found that average daily use – two to three applications a day – led to a potentially dangerous intake of chromium in ten of the 32 lipsticks and glosses. High use – around eight applications a day – could lead women and girls being exposed to too much aluminium and manganese, the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* reports. The researchers warned that once applied, the colours and glosses and their contents, are ingested 'bit by bit' by the wearer.

Researcher Katharine Hammond said: 'Just finding these metals isn't the issue; it's the levels that matter.'

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'Some of these toxic metals are occurring at levels that could possibly have an effect on long-term health.' Levels of lead did not prove to be a cause for concern – expect perhaps for children who might use their mother's make-up when playing dressing up games.

In an earlier study, also carried out in the U.S., traces of lead were found in hundreds of different lipsticks, including some made by L'Oreal, Maybelline and Revlon.

Professor Hammond said that although the number of products tested was small, the findings are important. She said: 'The lipsticks and lip glosses in our study are common brands available in stores everywhere. 'Based on our finding, a larger, more thorough survey of lip products and cosmetics in general is warranted.' Elizabeth Salter Green, director of UK-based campaign group CHEM Trust said there are particular concerns about the health effect of such chemicals on young women who may become pregnant. She added: 'The worrying levels of metal in US lipstick should be a wake-up call to all areas of the world, including the EU, and they ought to be removed.'

'There needs to be improved testing for not only the individual chemicals themselves, but also what effects the "whole cocktail" of our exposure to harmful metals and chemicals may be.' Chris Flower, of the trade body, the Cosmetics, Toiletry and Perfumery Association, said that a big brands will sometimes, but not always, use the same the product recipe around the world. He said that the US researchers were taking a 'very conservative approach' and their concerns are already covered by EU legislation.