



## Asbestos in Makeup

In 2017, asbestos was found in several children's makeup products sold by retailers Claire's and Justice. The products were recalled, but parents and consumers remain concerned because this isn't the first time asbestos has been found in everyday products.





## Why Is Asbestos in Makeup?

Asbestos ends up in makeup because of poor regulations involving cosmetic-grade talc, which is also known as [talcum powder](#). Talc and asbestos are minerals that form together. That means talc mined for commercial uses can be contaminated with asbestos — a known cause of lung cancer and [mesothelioma](#).

Talc is added to makeup because it creates a soft, silky texture, and it dilutes pigmented products and acts as filler. It is a common ingredient in powder compacts, finishing powders, eye shadows, blushes, foundations and creams.

It is the softest mineral on earth and is known for its ability to absorb moisture and reduce the appearance of oily skin. For example, talc-based face powders are commonly used on top of cream foundations to “set” the foundation so that it stays in place and looks naturally dry instead of oily and shiny.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says it is important to select talc mining sites carefully and take steps to purify talc to prevent

asbestos contamination in cosmetic products. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done.

There is a long history of asbestos remaining in talc that is certified asbestos-free. Manufacturers don’t purposely add asbestos to cosmetics, but there is a lack of regulation around cosmetic-grade talc. Because of that relaxed oversight, no one is checking for the presence of asbestos. That means companies can get away with not testing their talc for asbestos before putting it into their products — possibly harming consumers.

## US Government Is Not Regulating Asbestos in Talc

The FDA does not regulate cosmetic-grade talc. The Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act of 1938 does not require the FDA to review cosmetic products and their ingredients, with the exception of color additives.

However, in 1976, the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association (now known as the Personal Care Products Council) asked its members to use asbestos-free talc in their products. While the FDA says that it “considers it unacceptable for cosmetic talc to be contaminated with asbestos,” there are no U.S. laws or regulations that strictly prohibit talc used in consumer products from containing asbestos.

Cosmetic manufacturers certainly may try to avoid talc contaminated with asbestos, but there is no regulating body checking commercial talc for asbestos. The FDA and other federal agencies do not examine talc and talc-containing products made overseas.

From 2009 to 2010, the FDA conducted studies on samples of talc from four suppliers along with 34 makeup samples and found no asbestos contamination. However, all the makeup samples were collected from the Washington, D.C. area, whereas other studies that did find asbestos in cosmetics collected samples throughout the United States. Additionally, the FDA asked nine talc suppliers for samples, but only four complied.

“The results were limited, however, by the fact that only four talc suppliers submitted samples and by the number of products tested,”

according to the FDA. “For these reasons, while FDA finds these results informative, they do not prove that most or all talc or talc-containing cosmetic products currently marketed in the United States are likely to be free of asbestos contamination.”



*Claire's makeup recalled for asbestos contamination.*

Operators of the nine commercial talc mines in the United States, overseas suppliers of talc and the cosmetic industry as a whole all say there is no asbestos in their talc, despite scientific investigations proving otherwise.

“When it comes to cosmetics regulation, it’s the Wild West,” Campaign for Safe Cosmetics spokesperson Margie Kelly told the Seattle Post-Intelligencer in 2014. “The FDA doesn’t have the authority to do much of anything to protect consumers because it is working with a 75-year-old law that has never been substantially updated, so consumers end up with unsafe cosmetics staying on store shelves even after harm has been proven.”

## Asbestos in Children's Makeup

In December 2017, a lab confirmed it found asbestos in makeup products sold by Claire's, an accessory and jewelry retailer that markets its products to girls and young women. Just five months later, the same lab identified asbestos in Just Shine Shimmer Powder sold by Justice, a retailer that sells clothing, accessories and cosmetics to girls and teens.

Investigators purchased Claire's makeup products from nine different states and found tremolite asbestos in every product. A total of 17 samples were tested, including duplicate products coming from different states, which amounted to nine different products that Claire's later recalled.

Location	Claire's Product
Providence, Rhode Island	Mint Glitter Makeup Set
Chicago	Mint Glitter Makeup Set
Seattle	Mint Glitter Makeup Set
New York	Pink Glitter Palette with Eyeshadow & Lip Gloss
Greensboro, North Carolina	Mint Glitter Makeup Set
Milwaukee	Mint Glitter Makeup Set
Greensboro, North Carolina	Bedazzled Rainbow Heart Makeup Set
Greensboro, North Carolina	Pink Glitter Cellphone Makeup Compact
Greensboro, North Carolina	Professional Eye Make Up Kit (from 3-4 years ago)
Indianapolis	Rainbow Bedazzled Star Make Up Set
Indianapolis	Rainbow Bedazzled Rectangle Make Up Set
Indianapolis	Bedazzled Rainbow Heart Makeup Set
Indianapolis	Mint Glitter Makeup Set
Los Angeles	Ultimate Mega Make Up Set
Los Angeles	Metallic Hot Pink Glitter 48 Piece Makeup Set
Atlanta	Rainbow Bedazzled Star Make Up Set
Atlanta	Rainbow Glitter Heart Shaped Makeup Set

The government-licensed Scientific Analytical Institute (SAI) in Greensboro, North Carolina, found the asbestos in these products.

“We realize the geology and mineralogy of talc is closely associated with the geology and mineralogy of asbestos,” Sean Fitzgerald, director of research and analytical services at SAI, told Asbestos.com. “It shouldn’t surprise us that the potential for contamination is there.”

Fitzgerald added: “I could go across the street right now to the mall, and pick up talc powder that I know from previous testing, more likely than not, will contain some amount of asbestos.”

These cases are not rare to Fitzgerald. In fact, he has found asbestos in consumer products many times. In 2015, his lab found asbestos in children’s crayons and a toy fingerprint kit. He is also one of three authors of an extensive study of talcum powder as a cause of mesothelioma in women.

“Every time I test a variety of the off-the-shelf cosmetics I always find asbestos in some of the talc,” Fitzgerald told the Seattle Post-Intelligencer in 2014. “This remains a hazard to consumers that should not be ignored.”

On March 13, 2018, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) said it found more asbestos in other makeup products sold by Claire’s. PIRG conducted tests on four of Claire’s makeup products and discovered high levels of asbestos in three of them.

**The three contaminated products in the PIRG report include:**

- Claire’s Compact Powder (White)
- Claire’s Contour Palette
- Claire’s Shadow and Highlight Finishing Kit

Claire’s denied the test results. The retailer stated the company only uses talc certified asbestos-free talc in its products.

In addition to Claire’s products, U.S. PIRG tested 11 other talc-containing cosmetic products made by Cover Girl, L’Oreal and NYX Professional Makeup. None of the other products contained asbestos.

A week prior to U.S. PIRG releasing its test results, reports began to circulate that Claire's was planning to file for bankruptcy. On March 19, 2018, USA Today reported that Claire's filed for bankruptcy, citing more than \$2 billion in debt.

Justice announced on Feb. 1, 2018 that while their initial tests showed no asbestos, a second round of tests they ordered found trace amounts of asbestos in Just Shine makeup. Justice recalled eight products as a result of the second round of tests.

Talc is added to many consumer products in addition to cosmetics including deodorants, powders, soap, feminine hygiene products, contraception devices, pills, textiles, chalk, children's balloons, clay and crayons.

## **Proposed Legislation for Warnings on Children's Makeup**

In response to the reports of asbestos in children's makeup, U.S. Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich., introduced a bill on Feb. 7, 2018 that aims to protect kids from asbestos in makeup.

If passed, the Children's Product Warning Label Act of 2018 would require a warning label for any cosmetic product marketed to children that isn't proven asbestos-free.

The bill would require manufacturers of children's makeup to use a warning label stating the product may contain asbestos, unless they submit proof to the Department of Health and Human Services that the ingredients are sourced from an asbestos-free mine.

Manufacturers would have to use the most reliable testing methods to prove the product is free of asbestos, including the transmission electron microscopy method.



## How Do You Avoid Asbestos in Makeup?

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Simply looking for “all natural” or organic cosmetics isn’t enough to avoid asbestos-contaminated talc. That’s because talc is an all-natural substance. There’s no surefire way to know if the talc in a product is truly asbestos-free without extensive testing of the individual product. You’ve got to look at the product label to see if it contains talc and avoid it if it does.

**Knowing the different terms used to describe talc is important. The mineral may be labeled under several different terms, including the following:**

- Talc
- Cosmetic talc
- Talcum
- Magnesium silicate
- Talcum powder

Certain cosmetic products and brands make talc-free makeup and cosmetics. Online resources are available to find these brands and products. For example, you can use the websites Skin Deep and Made Safe to find talc-free cosmetics.

**You can also consider the following cosmetic brands that are made free of talc:**

- Pacifica
- Honest Beauty
- Shea Moisture
- Affordable Mineral Makeup
- bareMinerals
- Everyday Minerals
- Smashbox
- Ecco Bella

It's probably wise to avoid talc in general because some scientific research indicates that it may increase the risk of uterine and ovarian cancer in women and lung cancer among miners. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises against the use of baby powder, which is predominately made of talc, because infants can easily breathe in the powder.

Parents can protect their children from asbestos in makeup by buying only cosmetics free of talc. Sadly, it's up to consumers to protect themselves and their children from this risk because the government isn't doing enough to regulate asbestos.







## What Does “Asbestos-Free” Actually Mean?

The U.S. government decided that products may contain up to 1 percent asbestos and be labeled as “asbestos-free.” As a result, hundreds to thousands of asbestos fibers remain in products that aren’t considered asbestos-containing materials in the eyes of the law.

**The laws and regulations pertaining to asbestos were defined by the following federal agencies, which also ensure corporations and citizens follow the laws:**

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
- Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA)

The EPA [tried to ban asbestos](#) in 1989, but pro-asbestos lobbying groups fought hard to successfully overturn the ban in 1991. The Bush Sr. administration refused to allow the EPA to appeal. As a result, numerous products on the market contain asbestos, especially building materials such as roofing and flooring supplies.

Asbestos in makeup falls in a grey area of the law. There is no law that regulates asbestos in talc, and the FDA can’t do anything about it unless scientific data shows it is harmful under its intended use, which is hard to prove given the long latency period associated with

asbestos-related diseases. It takes between 10 to 50 years for asbestos-related diseases to develop.

Only a few lawsuits have compensated patients who claimed they developed mesothelioma as a result of asbestos-contaminated talc. These lawsuits were based on individual products no longer on the market. The FDA didn’t have to take any action because the scientific data was based on products that aren’t available today including Cashmere Bouquet talcum powder and products made from talc supplied by Whittaker, Clark & Daniels.



## What Are the Proper Asbestos Testing Methods?

Retailers Justice and Claire's claimed they had the products in question tested by other laboratories that found the products to be free of asbestos. However, the kind of testing conducted by those labs was likely not sufficient to detect microscopic asbestos fibers.

Justice and Claire's said their labs are certified by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), which is intended to demonstrate that the lab can produce accurate tests or calibration data. However, the ISO does not certify that a lab can properly test for trace amounts of asbestos.

Fitzgerald of the Scientific Analytical Institute used the most advanced testing available to find asbestos in Justice and Claire's makeup.

"The test for the determination for asbestos in talc is not something that ISO specifically certifies a laboratory for," Fitzgerald said. "[Claire's] assertion that two ISO-certified laboratories didn't find any asbestos doesn't impress me in the least."

Fitzgerald uses a transmission electron microscope (TEM) to detect asbestos. The EPA recommends the use of TEM to test for asbestos because it is exceedingly better than other methods such as X-ray diffraction (XRD) and polarized light microscopy (PLM).

"When other laboratories tested, perhaps they're using light microscopy or XRD, which is not sensitive enough," Fitzgerald said. "If I only use PLM or XRD on my samples, more likely than not, only a couple of them would have been positive, if any."

Manipulating scientific data is nothing new for companies with asbestos in their products. Asbestos product manufacturers have been [covering up the health effects of asbestos](#) since the early 20th century.



## Consumers Must Protect Themselves

Unfortunately, when it comes to asbestos in makeup the legal term caveat emptor, which is Latin for “let the buyer beware,” applies all too often

It is up to the consumer to avoid talc products that may be contaminated with asbestos because no federal agency is responsible for regulating asbestos in makeup.

The best a parent or consumer can do is avoid cosmetics that contain talc, which requires reading labels and learning which brands leave talc out of their products.