Concerns Raised Over Chemical In Baby Shampoo

A peer-reviewed paper in the Journal of the Dermatology Nurses' Association raises fresh concerns that the chemical preservative used in America's leading baby shampoo may be causing increased rates of allergic contact dermatitis, an inflammation of the skin that varies from mild irritation to rashes and open sores.

The paper states that quaternium 15, a chemical preservative that kills bacteria by releasing formaldehyde, "is the most sensitizing formaldehyde-releasing preservative and has been repeatedly shown to be a strong allergen that can cause contact dermatitis."

Quaternium 15 — used in many baby products including Johnson's Baby Shampoo, Mr. Bubble Bath and Huggies Baby Wash — is considered by the North American Contact Dermatitis Group to be among the most clinically significant contact allergens in children.

"Quaternium 15 is present in an alarmingly high number of baby products, making exposure and sensitization at an early age increasingly common," said Sharon Jacob, M.D., co-author of the paper and physician at the Department of Medicine and Pediatrics at Rady Children's Hospital. "This is a concern because repeated exposures to sensitizing chemicals, especially in early life, can cause a person to develop allergic reactions over time. Therefore, we advise parents to choose products without quaternium 15 and other formaldehyde-releasing preservatives whenever possible."

According to the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep database, more than 600 body-care products contain quaternium 15; many are children's products labeled "extra gentle" or "for sensitive skin." Johnson & Johnson and Cover Girl had the highest number of products in the database containing the chemical.

The paper comes on the heels of the March 2009 report by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics that found dozens of top-selling children's bath products, including Johnson's Baby Shampoo, were contaminated with the carcinogens formaldehyde and 1,4-dioxane.

In August, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics and American Nurses Association met with Johnson & Johnson to ask the company to remove hazardous chemicals from its children's products. Lisa Archer, national coordinator of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics from the Breast Cancer Fund, said, "We urge Johnson & Johnson to show its leadership by reformulating its baby products to remove quaternium 15 and other chemicals of concern. Many companies are already making products without these hazardous ingredients."

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