



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Press Statement

23 December 2020

CAP: Stop the sale of talc-based products

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) calls on the Ministry of Health to re-consider its stand not to ban talcum powder and tal based products as new studies have shown that talc is hazardous to health.

In a new study, commissioned by the **Environmental Working Group** and published in the journal *Environmental Health Insights*, researchers criticise the methods used by the cosmetic industry to screen their talc-based products and propose a swift correction.

The study found asbestos in 15% of 21 talc-based cosmetics samples analysed using electron microscopy. The researchers said that the current voluntary screening methods by the cosmetics industry for the cancer-causing carcinogen are inadequate.

Cosmetics companies add talc to their powder-based products, such as eye shadows, blushes and foundations to achieve a smooth texture and to dilute the colours in some pigmented cosmetics. Talc is naturally soft and able to absorb moisture to reduce the appearance of oily skin. It can also be deadly.

“Inhaling even the tiniest amount of asbestos in talc can cause mesothelioma and other deadly diseases, many years after exposure,” said Tasha Stoiber, a senior scientist at the **Environmental Working Group** and study co-author. “How much talc is inhaled — and how much is contaminated with asbestos — is hard to know, but it only takes one asbestos fiber, lodged in the lungs, to cause mesothelioma decades later.”

Loose talc in cosmetics is of concern as in this form it can be more easily inhaled than solid, pressed powders. When inhaled, talc fibres can lodge in the lungs and cause pulmonary fibrosis—scar tissue build-up that causes breathing difficulty.

Asbestos and talc minerals are often found side by side in the earth, which can cause contamination in cosmetic products. Asbestos is known to cause a specific cancer known as **mesothelioma**.

A paper by Moline, et. al. provides evidence of 33 mesothelioma cases attributable to asbestos-contaminated cosmetic talc powder usage.¹ Emory, et.al. reported 75 additional individuals with malignant mesothelioma whose only known exposure was cosmetic talc and this is further evidence that cosmetic talc should be considered a probable cause of mesothelioma.²

Talcum powder has been directly used on the skin as an effective absorbent to help deodorise and for imparting a silky touch. The primary component in talcum powder is magnesium silicate hydroxide (commonly known as talc). Talc is similar to asbestos in composition, it is found in baby powder, eye shadow, blush, and deodorant. Talc is linked to ovarian cancer and respiratory problems.

Even though talc is widely used in cosmetics around the world, the possibility of asbestos-free talc being carcinogenic has prompted the European Union to ban talc-based cosmetics altogether.

Recently the healthcare giant Johnson & Johnson announced that it will stop selling its talc-based Johnson’s Baby Powder in the US and Canada. In this regard there are calls by civil society groups for Johnson & Johnson to stop this double standards and stop selling its cosmetic talc products worldwide.

Johnson & Johnson also faces thousands of lawsuits from consumers in the US who claim that its talc products caused their cancer. The move comes after years of litigation where the firm has been ordered to pay out billions of dollars in compensation.

In 2016, Johnson & Johnson was ordered to pay \$72 million in damages to the family of an Alabama woman who died from ovarian cancer allegedly caused by using the company's Baby Powder and other products that contained talc for feminine hygiene. In October 2020, Johnson & Johnson agreed to settle more than 1,000 talcum powder lawsuits for \$100 million.

The news media Reuters reported on the 9 June 2020 that cosmetic brands Chanel, Revlon and L'Oreal had discontinued using talc in some products as U.S. cancer lawsuits and consumer concerns mount.³ The article also stated that other personal care companies have also stopped selling talc powder. For instance German company Beiersdorf AG had switched to corn starch in its Nivea baby powder in 2018.

In Malaysia, ovarian cancer is the fifth most common cancer amongst women, with about 500 being diagnosed with the disease each year. It is a common cancer among women who are above 50 years of age and it was most prevalent among the Malays followed by Chinese and Indians. Ovarian cancer is known as particularly deadly because it is a silent cancer as it grows quietly and is often detected at the final stages.

Talc is toxic as its particles can cause tumours in human ovaries and lungs. Talc particles are capable of moving up the reproductive system and embedding themselves in the lining of the ovary. Researchers have found talc particles in ovarian tumour and have found that women with ovarian cancer have used talcum powder in their genital more frequently than healthy women.

Talcum powder also poses a major risk to our lungs as its tiny particles may easily work their way into them. The puffy white cloud of powder once airborne is inhaled by babies and other users. The inhalation of powder during diaper changing sessions has led to injuries and even death of babies. Talc may cause a baby's airways to swell and cause pneumonia. Talcum powder has also been linked to causing asthma in children.

Statistics have shown that several thousand of infants each year have died or become seriously ill following accidental inhalation of baby powder. Talc is used on babies because it absorbs unpleasant moisture. Dusting infants with talcum powder endangers their lungs. Exposing children to this carcinogen is unnecessary and dangerous.

In spite of the dangers associated with talcum powder there are numerous brands in the market and some of these brands target babies.

In view of the dangers associated with talcum powder and products containing talc, CAP had submitted a memorandum to the relevant authorities on 20 November 2020. The Consumers Association of Penang hence reiterate our call to the Ministry of Health to ban talcum powder and talc-based products.

Meanwhile consumers are advised to use powder which is made from corn or rice flour. Mothers are advised to use ointments instead of medicated powders for rashes in babies.

FATHIMA BINTI MOHD IDRIS
Vice President

¹ Moline J, Bevilacqua K, Alexandri M, Gordon RE. Mesothelioma associated with the use of cosmetic talc. *J Occup Environ Med. JOEM.* 2020; 62(1):11-17.

² Emory TS, Maddox JC, Kradin RL. Malignant mesothelioma following repeated exposures to cosmetic talc: A case series of 75 patients. *Am J Ind Med.* 2020;63(6):484-489. doi:10.1002/ajim.23106

³ Exclusive: Chanel, Revlon, L'Oreal pivoting away from talc in some products. 9 June 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-chanel-talc-powder-exclusive/exclusive-chanel-revlon-loreal-pivoting-away-from-talc-in-some-products-idUSKBN23G0GK>. Accessed on 10 June 2020.