FDA Warns Consumers of Skin Products Tainted With Mercury

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Officials in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warn consumers to watch out for beauty and hygiene products that contain the toxic metal mercury, the International Business Times reports. Health officials in seven states—California, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Texas and Virginia—all recount finding high levels of mercury in skin care products, and multiple instances of mercury poisoning have been linked to their use.

Mercury is highly toxic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that long-term exposure can lead to brain or kidney damage. Even short-term exposure can have negative effects such as lung damage, increased heart rate or blood pressure, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, rashes or eye irritation. Other symptoms of mercury poisoning include numbness or tingling in the mouth or extremities; problems with vision, hearing or memory; tremors; depression; or irritability.

Affected products include soaps, skin creams and lotions, many of which claim to lighten skin or remove blemishes such as age spots, freckles, wrinkles or acne. The products are manufactured outside the United States and sold illegally, often online or through stores in African-American, Asian, Latino or Middle Eastern neighborhoods.

Manufacturers whose products were found to contain mercury include Lulanjina, Crème Diana, Qian Mei, Fasco, Stillman's and Jiao Li. Skin care products from other companies may also prove to be tainted, however, so the FDA advises using all such products with caution.

The FDA warns against using any product without an ingredient label or with an ingredient label that isn't in English. In addition, you should check ingredient labels on any kind of skin-care or skin-lightening product for mercury. (It may be listed under another name, such as mercurous chloride, calomel, mercuric or mercurio.)

If you think you've been exposed to mercury, wash every part of your body that's touched the stuff—including your hands—and contact your doctor. Also, don't just throw the product away; mercury isn't biodegradable, so it needs to be disposed of properly. (No one wants it leaching into your groundwater from a landfill or getting into the air from a trash incinerator.) Seal it up inside a plastic bag and contact your local environmental health agency for instructions on how to get rid of it safely.

To read the International Business Times article, click here.

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