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Environmental Defence tested five families across the country for 68 chemicals, including pesticides, PCBs, stain repellants, flame retardants, mercury and lead. Found in countless everyday products, including much of the teen arsenal of cool, these chemicals are associated with cancer, hormone disruption, reproductive disorders, damage to the nervous system, respiratory illnesses and harming children's development. Perhaps most disturbing of all, some of the children in the study had higher levels of some of the chemicals than their parents, indicating that their exposure had been much more intense over their shorter lives.

Why does it take an NGO like Environmental Defence to tell us our reliance on chemicals has run amok? It's clear that in the cosmetics industry, like virtually every other, health concerns are not exactly paramount. The prime consideration, or so it would seem at a glance down the cosmetics aisles, is for an even wider array of product choices to prey upon the inevitable insecurities of the teen consumer.

AS OF NOVEMBER, there is now legislation that will require cosmetics companies to list the ingredients in their products, which is a small step in the right direction. It's creepy, once you stop and think about it, that we have been spritzing, lathering and dusting ourselves for this long without

much idea of what was in the products we've been using. And those ingredient lists will be mighty long, too. Lots of curious multi-syllabic stuff comes together to make the potions of prettiness and style.

But will being able to read about what they're dousing themselves with really make a difference to adolescent cosmetics customers? Let's use that rebellious stage to universal advantage: let's teach our teens to fight the corporate powers that are trying to co-opt their sense of self-image into another kind of chemical addiction. In the end, good health should be every teen's idea of something that's "totally sick." 🌿

12 Healthy Alternatives

Aveda: full range of makeup, hair and skin products

Burt's Bees: chapsticks, skin care, makeup, hair care

Aubrey: hair, skin and body care products

Lavera: makeup and skin-care products

BWC (Beauty without Cruelty): makeup and skin care

Dr. Hauschka: skin-care products

Druide: bath products and hair care

Ecco Bella: makeup, skin-care and bath products

Giovanni: bath, hair and skin products

Avalon organic hair care MOP (Modern Organic Products): hair-care products

Weleda: cosmetics

5 chemicals to avoid in makeup

PHTHATALE FAMILY or di-n-butyl phthalate (DBP) and di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP)

Can result in: endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) and carcinogens linked to birth defects; premature breast development; lowered sperm counts; testicular injury; damage to reproductive organs; lung, liver and kidney cancer.

Why used: makes plastic soft and malleable.

Where: nail polish, hair-straighteners and sprays, body lotions, deodorants.

LAURYL SULFATE (SLS), Sodium laureth sulfate (SLES)

Can result in: suspected carcinogen linked to kidney and liver damage; nervous-system disruption; damage to eyes, leading to cataracts; eczema and dermatitis, known to inflame skin layers.

Why used: a foaming agent and emulsifier.

Where: toothpaste, shampoo, bath salts, body and shower gels.

PARABEN PRESERVATIVES or alkyl-p-hydroxybenzoates (methyl, propyl, butyl and ethyl)

Can result in: hormone-disrupter, estrogenic (mimics natural estrogens, which can lead to cancer); linked to breast cancer; skin rashes.

Why used: germicide and preservative.

Where: conditioners, hair-styling gels, nail creams, foundations, concealers, mascara, facial masks, skin creams, deodorants, sunscreen, hair-colouring products.

FORMALDEHYDE FAMILY or Diazolidinyl urea,

3-diol Imidazolidinyl urea, DMDM Hydantoin, Quaternium-15, Nitropropane-1, Formalin, Methanal, Methyl aldehyde, Methylene oxide, Morbicide acid, Oxymethylene

Can result in: carcinogen; causes allergic reactions and contact dermatitis; headaches; irritates mucous membranes; damaging to eyes; linked to joint and chest pain; depression; headaches; fatigue; dizziness and immune dysfunction.

Why used: disinfectant, germicide, fungicide, defoamer and preservative; cheap and mixes easily with water.

Where: shampoo, conditioners, shower gels, skin lotions, bubble bath, hair-care products, antiperspirants, nail polish, talcs, mascara, mouthwash, makeup remover.

AMINE FAMILY or Diethanolamine (DEA), triethanolamine (TEA), and monoethanolamine (MEA)

Can result in: hormone-disrupter; carcinogen linked to liver and kidney cancer; irritant to hair and skin; corrosive to eyes; causes contact dermatitis; reacts with other chemicals to form carcinogenic nitrosamines.

Why used: emulsifier, pH adjuster, preservative; foaming agent added to coconut oils.

Where: shampoo, soaps, hair sprays, sunscreens, foundations, concealers, eyeliner, talcs, face powders, shaving creams, hair-colouring products (women and men), hair sprays.