

British Skin Foundation

PRESS RELEASE

How big an issue is illegal skin lightening creams in the UK?

For immediate release

The British Skin Foundation (BSF) is looking for users of skin lightening creams to help them shed light on what effect illegally skin lightening products are having in the UK, and just how widely used they are.

The skin disease research charity has launched an online survey that looks into why people use skin lightening creams, who uses them, and what, if any, side effects they may have experienced.

Although there are skin lightening products available that are perfectly legal in the UK, there are also products being sold or bought into the country that do not follow the EU's safety guidelines and contain banned substances in their formulation. It is these products, often obtained from 'under the counter', that have the potential to be hugely damaging to the user's health.

The use of mercury in cosmetic products has been banned in the EU since 1976. Ingredients such as hydroquinone and high-dose steroids have also been deemed as illegal when used in cosmetics, thanks to the danger they may pose to users who are often unaware of any possible side effects. Devastatingly, some of these side effects may in fact leave the skin in a far worse state than it was to begin with.

Dr Bav Shergill, a spokesperson for the British Skin Foundation and a Consultant Dermatologist, says:

"Many illegal skin lightening beauty products promise to lighten dark blemishes and make complexions fairer, though people should be aware that there are dangers associated with use of these products. Personal recommendations by a friend or relative are certainly not the same as having something prescribed to you by a doctor who can advise you on how to minimise the risks associated with a product.

"In terms of the possible side effects of using skin lightening products that contain mercury, these include increased pigmentation, foetal abnormalities if used during pregnancy, and severe itchy rashes. In high doses, they can also cause psychological damage.

"Skin lightening products that contain high-dose steroids can lead to permanent skin bleaching, thinning of skin and development of visible blood vessels, known as telangiectasia. What's more, the colour loss on the skin may not be even resulting in a patchy effect. Hydroquinone can cause intense irritation, uneven bleaching of the skin and a distressing condition called cutaneous ochronosis, which is a bluish black discoloration of the skin.

“Bear in mind that products that contain these ingredients are banned for a reason. The negative side effects can have a huge emotional impact on the user, so it is important to discuss any issues or concerns you have about skin tone with your GP.”

If you use, or have used, skin lightening creams and want to take part in the anonymous online survey , please head to www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk

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For more information about the survey contact: Bevis Man, Press Officer at the British Skin Foundation. Phone: 0207 391 6347, email: bevis@bad.org.uk, Website: www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk

The British Skin Foundation (BSF) is a charity committed to raising funds for skin cancer and skin disease research. Working closely with the British Association of Dermatologists (BAD) the BSF is the only charity dedicated to supporting dermatologists and skin science.

Over the last four years, the BSF has awarded in excess of £2.7 million to a number of studies that aim to find new treatments and eventually cures for the many skin diseases in the UK.