

The facts about...

‘black henna’ temporary tattoos

Know the facts

Temporary tattoos, or henna tattoos, can be a fun way to decorate your skin while at a fair, festival or on a beach holiday. But before you choose which pattern or symbol to go for, beware that so-called ‘black henna’ tattoos can cause painful short and long-term damage to your skin.

The truth is that henna extract is orange-red in colour. So called ‘black henna’ tattoos are not henna at all, but are mixed with a substance called PPD (paraphenylenediamine). This use of PPD is illegal, and it can be very harmful if applied direct to your skin in the high concentrations often used in these types of tattoos.

Why should I avoid ‘black henna’ temporary tattoos?

PPD is used safely as an ingredient in hair colorants, but when applied directly to the skin at the high concentration needed in a temporary tattoo it can leave you with a swollen, sore, red ‘burn’. It can also sensitise you to PPD, triggering a painful allergic reaction called ‘contact dermatitis’. The area to which PPD is applied can flare up and leave you with a swollen, sore, red rash. Not the look you were after!

And it doesn't stop there. ‘Black henna’ tattoos can also cause long-term damage by making your skin more susceptible to reactions when you use other, safe, products which contain PPD, such as a hair colorant. Hair colorants themselves are regulated under the stringent UK and EU cosmetic safety regulations and are safe to use when the instructions are followed carefully.

Although PPD should not be used in temporary tattoos, some illegal uses still continue, especially around busy holiday resorts, beaches and fairs. Tell your family and friends about the dangers of these illegal uses so they too can avoid them.



What should I do if I react to a ‘black henna’ temporary tattoo?

If you do suffer a reaction from a temporary tattoo, consult your doctor who may refer you to a dermatologist to carry out a patch test. This will identify what ingredient has caused the problem so you can steer clear of it in future. It is also very likely that you will not be able to colour your hair with a permanent (oxidative) hair colorant following a reaction to a ‘black henna’ tattoo. It is absolutely essential to do an allergy alert test 48 hours before colouring the hair, if you are considering colouring your hair. Having a reaction to a temporary tattoo may mean you'll have to avoid colouring your hair altogether in the future – so steer clear of ‘black henna’ tattoos!

