

# A guide to cosmetics for babies, toddlers and mums-to-be

“Is it safe to colour my hair while I’m pregnant?” “Should I only use natural cosmetics while I’m breastfeeding?” “What’s the best way to use sunscreen to keep my child safe?” These are just a few of the queries that worried mums and dads put to the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association (CTPA) each year through its website: [www.thefactsabout.co.uk](http://www.thefactsabout.co.uk).

In fact, research by YouGov for CTPA suggests that nearly nine out of ten parents are concerned at some level that the chemicals in their everyday products might impact their children’s health<sup>1</sup> - and more than half (54%) would feel reassured by a better understanding of the ingredients in their products and what they do.

CTPA has created the following guide to help address some of the most common questions asked by parents about the safe use of cosmetics, both during pregnancy and on young children. All questions covered have either been submitted

by some of the UK’s top parenting journalists on behalf of their readers or are taken from a live webchat with mums which was hosted by CTPA in partnership with Netmums in 2010.

## Can using cosmetics affect my unborn baby?

Cosmetic products are covered by strict safety laws which include a safety assessment for each product.

The safety assessment must take into account all the different situations and conditions in which the products are likely to be used, including their use by women during pregnancy. If any risks at all are identified, the law requires that product makers must put clear warnings on the product labels.

This means you can continue to enjoy your cosmetic products during pregnancy.



## Is it safe to use toiletries on babies and young children?

Yes, it’s absolutely safe to use those which are intended to be used on babies and infants. Such products are specially formulated. For example, they use milder cleansers, low levels of fragrance and carefully control the pH to ensure compatibility with baby skin. Also, there is an enhanced safety assessment legally required for all cosmetic products intended for use on children under three years of age.

<sup>1</sup> YouGov survey among 2013 UK adults aged 18+ carried out between 1st – 3rd April 2009



## Is it safe to colour my hair while pregnant or breastfeeding?

Colouring your hair when you are breastfeeding or pregnant is perfectly safe. As always, it is really important to make sure you follow the product instructions and carry out the allergy alert test as directed 48 hours before colouring your hair. However, some women can be extremely concerned about colouring their hair at this time and for them it is better to avoid the source of anxiety and not have their hair coloured – even though there are no safety concerns from the colouring itself.



## Is it safe to use self-tanning lotions during pregnancy or when breastfeeding?

Yes, self-tanning products are safe to use during pregnancy and whilst breastfeeding although you probably wouldn't want to apply it to your breasts because it won't taste or smell very nice for your baby and you wouldn't want them to swallow it. Some mothers worry about the effect of cosmetics on their breast milk. There is no evidence to suggest that cosmetics make breast milk unsafe.

## Is SLS safe and why does it have to be added to products?

Unfortunately an old internet rumour is routinely re-circulated, and is often perpetuated in media articles, which alleges that the use of SLS (sodium lauryl sulfate) is not safe in cosmetic products. This is just not true. SLS has an excellent safety record with a wealth of information from around the world on safe use. In science terms, SLS is technically known as a surfactant (surface-active agent) and it's usually used in cosmetic products for its cleansing properties and to enable liquids, such as shampoo, to foam.

## What are parabens and can they be harmful to my children?

Sadly there is a lot of misinformation about parabens, including allegations that they are linked to cancer. In fact, they are not a cause of cancer of any kind. Parabens are preservatives and keep products free from bacteria, moulds and fungi that would otherwise spoil the product and could cause real harm to the user.

Parabens are very good at this and yet they are non-toxic to human cells. This is because our own skin cells rapidly and easily break parabens down into harmless smaller pieces. This means they are not able to cause harm and do not lead to skin sensitisation. It also means they won't persist in the environment or harm wildlife in any way. Far from being dangerous, parabens are perhaps the ideal preservative, which is why they are also widely found in nature in things as diverse as royal jelly made by bees to fruits such as raspberries.





## Should I avoid buying toothpaste that contains fluoride for my children?

Fluoride is a very safe and effective way to help prevent tooth decay, so is an important ingredient in toothpaste and mouthwashes. It works by making the enamel (that's the tooth's hard outer surface) more resistant to acids produced by the bacteria living on the teeth and gums. The levels in toothpaste are safe but the advice is not to allow children to swallow large amounts (the small amount naturally swallowed is safe) and not to use too much paste (only a pea-sized amount) at one time.

The use of fluoride in toothpastes is controlled by European laws for cosmetic products which set the maximum level that can be used. However, recognising that people may feel strongly about this issue and should have personal choice, there are toothpastes widely available that are without fluoride.

## Should I be using only natural or organic products on my child's sensitive skin?

Almost any substance, natural or man-made, has the potential to cause an allergic reaction in someone, somewhere; the body does not differentiate whether something is natural or synthetic. There is no such thing as a 'chemical-free' product as in fact everything is made up of chemicals, from cosmetics, to water, to the human body. Sense About Science has some further information on chemicals that is worth a read: <http://www.senseaboutscience.org.uk/pdf/MakingSenseofChemicalStories.pdf>



## Can ingredients in everyday products be more easily absorbed through a child's skin than an adult's?

The skin of babies is more delicate than that of adults and can be damaged by coarse fabrics or rough towels for example. This is partly because baby skin is slightly thinner than adult skin (about 20 to 30%) but also because skin responds to the environment and babies are making the transition from life in the womb to life in the outside world. It takes time for baby skin to "toughen up".

A common concern is whether ingredients in cosmetic and personal care products are more easily absorbed into infant skin and whether this could lead to safety concerns now or later in life. Actually, babies are born with skin which is very nearly complete in its ability to act as a barrier and this further matures within the first two to four weeks of birth. So, although baby skin may be physically more sensitive than adult skin and thus requires gentler handling, from the point of view of being able to keep out unwanted substances, baby skin is an effective barrier.

**"Parents and pregnant women are bombarded by so many conflicting messages about what they should and shouldn't avoid to keep their child safe. As a mother myself, I know how confusing even a simple trip to the supermarket can be, trying to work out what all the different labels mean."**

**Ellen Raphael, Director UK  
Sense About Science**



## What factor sunscreen should I use on my children?

The British Skin Foundation recommends that children should use a minimum SPF 30 product with UVA protection.

<http://www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk/SkinInformation.aspx>

Of course it is important to try and keep sun exposure to a minimum for young children and especially babies under the age of 6 months. Try to keep them in the shade whenever possible and certainly during the hottest time of the day and keep them covered with t-shirts and hats. The CTPA's thefactsabout site has a dedicated section on keeping your child safe in the sun:

[www.thefactsabout.co.uk/childrensun](http://www.thefactsabout.co.uk/childrensun)

## If I use sunscreens on my child's skin does this create a risk of vitamin D deficiency?

There are very mixed messages about sunscreens and vitamin D. Vitamin D is essential for good health, and in particular to maintain healthy bones – but excessive sun exposure can cause damage too and so there needs to be a balance. It is possible to get enough vitamin D from eating certain foods (it is found in eggs, oily fish, fish liver oils and some fortified cereals) - but this might not suit everyone's diet; and some sunshine is a necessity. Sunlight acts on the skin to produce vitamin D. When exposed to the sun it is still important to protect the skin from the harmful effects of UV rays, including the use of sunscreens. Cancer Research UK has a great site called SunSmart (<http://www.sunsmart.org.uk>) which gives lots of helpful information and has a clear section on vitamin D: <http://www.sunsmart.org.uk/advice-and-prevention/vitamin-d/index.htm>



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