



PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET: formaldehyde

Your patch test shows that you have a contact allergy to: formaldehyde

Synonym(s): formalin, formol, methanal, oxomethane.

Definition: Formaldehyde is a gas, usually dissolved in a water and stabilized with methanol. It is used as a preservative.

Use and occurrence:

Formaldehyde is not used as such in cosmetics but the latter may contain preservatives called “formaldehyde releasers” i.e. substances that release formaldehyde to ensure correct preservation of the cosmetic product. These include: quaternium-15, diazolidinyl urea, imidazolidinyl urea, DMDM hydantoin, and bromonitropropanediol (bronopol)

They can be found in:

- in skin care products including cosmetics, shampoos, bath foam, deodorants, mouth washes, nail polish, soaps, creams, moist tissues for babies, mascara, etc; formaldehyde is rarely stated as an ingredient; cosmetics may however contain “formaldehyde releasers” (see below) which should be avoided.
- as a disinfectant or preservative in pharmaceutical products, (corticosteroid) creams, powders, tablets, vaccines, intravenous antibiotics, gargling mixtures, antiperspirants, antifungals, wart treatments.
- in household detergents, air fresheners, metal cleaning products and polishes.
- in paints, glues and varnishes.
- in disinfectants (hospitals, laboratories), for sterilizing instruments and dialysis apparatus.
- in fixatives and preservatives for histological and anatomical preparations; also for the preservation of donor organs (e.g. eardrum).
- in dentistry (in dental pastes for root-canal fillings).
- in cutting oils, metal processing (cooling) fluids and anti-freeze.
- in chemicals for photography (fixatives).
- in the paint, rubber, fur and leather industries.
- (historically) in fabric finishes and conditioners for textiles including permanent press and anti-wrinkle finishes.
- in pesticides, anti-worm products and seed disinfectants.
- in the burning of organic materials such as fuel, tobacco and charcoal.
- in paper (newspapers, magazines, art paper, photographic paper).
- as a basic product in the production of plastics and synthetic resins, principally with urea, phenol, poly-acetates, and melamine. The resins are used as a binder for chipboard, surface treatment, insulation foam, and plaster casts; also, fibreboard, plywood.
- in dry laundry products.
- in the fishmeal industry.



Remarks:

- It can be difficult to completely avoid formaldehyde as it is ubiquitously present in the environment. Moreover, studies have shown that some skin care products may contain low, yet unlabeled, quantities of formaldehyde.

- Other names indicating the presence of "formaldehyde releasers" may include: Germall 115 (imidazolidinyl urea), Germal II (diazolidinyl urea), Dowicil 200 (quaternium-15) , sodium hydroxymethylglycinate and Grotan BK[®].

- Aspartame, an artificial sweetener widely used in food and (light) drinks, is broken down by the body into formaldehyde, and can thus give rise to (localized) allergic skin reactions in formaldehyde-allergic subjects (e.g. eyelid dermatitis).

Disclaimer: Always check your products as these lists can never be complete and ingredients change.