



Toxics Link  
for a toxics-free world

## Press Release

# Sale of illegal mercury-laced skin whitening creams in India

*Imported skin whitening creams in India have high levels of toxic mercury content*

**New Delhi, November 11, 2021:** Dangerously high levels of mercury, a heavy metal and neurotoxin, were found in imported skin whitening creams being sold in Indian markets as reported by Toxics Link in its latest report “**Dark truth of skin whitening creams: Presence of Mercury in skin whitening creams**”.

According to the WHO, mercury is hazardous to health and has the potential to cause damage to the central nervous system, the gastrointestinal system and the kidneys. The UNEP has also shown concern over the fact that mercury bio-accumulates in the body tissue and its long-term exposure can have impact to the brain, heart, kidneys, lungs and immune system particularly, in unborn children and babies and Philippines were enlisted. These samples were collected from different cities of India, i.e., Mumbai, Vijayawada, Delhi and Trivandrum and tested in Shriram Institute for Industrial Research, New Delhi using Inductively Coupled Plasma-Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) by a standardized method.

This study detected mercury in six out of fifteen samples. Five samples had alarming levels of mercury ranging from 4000 to 14000 ppm. Only one out of six samples had mercury concentration below 1 ppm i.e., 0.3 ppm. These samples were purchased from Gaffer market in Delhi, Vashi in Navi Mumbai and Tarapet Market in Vijayawada. The study also revealed that all the six samples containing mercury were manufactured in Pakistan, according to the labels in the packaging. Moreover, the test results revealed that all the samples manufactured in India had mercury below detectable limits.

In India, there is a stringent regulation, under the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules 2020 to prevent mercury from being added to cosmetics. Manufacturing and import of cosmetics containing mercury compounds are completely prohibited; but unintentional mercury is allowed up to 1 ppm. However, the present study is an indicator that the mercury-containing products are still available in the Indian market. India has also ratified the Minamata convention on Mercury which restricts mercury use in cosmetics to 1 ppm.

It is disturbing that the mercury concentrations in some of the imported samples were found to be as high as 1000 times more than the current permissible limit of 1 ppm. It is also important to mention that a previous study by Toxics link in 2019 had also reported high mercury concentrations in same brands.

For that study, the samples were purchased from the online portals Amazon and Flipkart. Moreover, in that study it was also found that apart from these brands, other high mercury containing brands manufactured in the countries like China, Thailand Philippines and Indonesia were also found to be available in India through these online portals. Thus, it is clear that the mercury-laden creams are easily available in the country and are being sold both in offline shops and on online portals despite the strict regulations in place to contain mercury in cosmetics.

“Availability of highly toxic and non-compliant products in shops and on online portals are serious breach of the national rules and need to be acted upon immediately by the regulators” said **Mr. Satish Sinha, Associate Director, Toxics Link.**

The use of these products could result in severe health risks. Therefore, there is an urgent need for periodic monitoring of imported skin whitening creams by the regulatory authorities, to safeguard the health of the consumers. “A proper surveillance system needs to be in place to prevent high mercury-containing toxic skin whitening creams to be imported to India.” said **Mr. Piyush Mohapatra, Senior Program coordinator, Toxics Link.**

#### Key Findings

- Mercury was reported in six out of fifteen skin whitening cream samples purchased from **Mumbai, Delhi, Trivandrum, and Vijayawada**
- Five samples were found to contain very high mercury concentrations (4000 to 14000 ppm)
- One sample had a mercury concentration of 0.3 ppm, i.e., below the permissible limit of 1 ppm.
- All the six samples in which mercury was reported were imported creams from Pakistan and are also available in online portals like Amazon and Flipkart.
- All the Indian manufactured brands are within the safe limit of 1 ppm of mercury.

*Toxics Link is a Delhi based environmental research organization working on the issue of waste and chemical since last twenty years. Toxics Link is part of the global alliance of Zero mercury Working Group and involved in this mercury policy project.*

*The Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG) is an international coalition of more than 110 public interest environmental and health non-governmental organizations from over 55 countries from around the world formed in 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project.*

#### For Report:

<http://toxicslink.org/docs/MERCURY%20IN%20SKIN%20WHITENING%20CREAM.pdf>

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