

## SECTION 20

# PATCH TESTING



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## SECTION 20 – PATCH TESTING

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## 20.1 What is patch testing

A patch test is a way to find out if your workers and your individual customers are allergic to a product you are about to use.

It involves applying small amounts of known allergens to the skin using non-allergic tape.

Patch tests are legal requirements under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, for any hair or beauty treatment that involves dye or tint of any kind. This includes standard hair dyes or tins, balayage, toner, eyelash- and eyebrow tint, eye lash lifts, hair removal wax and more.



Carrying out a patch test before using products on your customers' hair is an important step to take.

A patch test is done to find out if the customer has any form of reaction to the ingredients contained within the dye. If a person has experienced allergic reactions before, it's **essential** you perform this step every time those products are used again, even if you're using the exact same formulation that was used previously. This is due to potential changes in formulations and ingredients - which can vary from batch to batch.

## 20.2 The importance of patch testing

5% people (1 in 20) will suffer an allergic reaction to having their hair coloured. Allergic reactions can range from an itchy rash or hives to full on anaphylactic shock, which can be always a life-threatening emergency and can be fatal.

Just because a person hasn't had an allergic reaction before, it doesn't mean they won't in the future - we can all develop new allergies at any stage of our lives.

Another factor to consider is the way hair dye manufacturers change their formulations all the time to make the dyes kinder to hair or work more effectively. For most, this may be a good thing, but a small number of people will find that products they used to have no issues with suddenly cause them irritation.

It is therefore really important to keep safe and patch test before using the actual product. It may be inconvenient for the customer to have to go to the hair salon a couple of days before the appointment, but **a patch test is**

**designed to protect them from harm** and is therefore an essential part of the process of colouring your hair.

## 20.3 Patch tests are an important legal requirement

Remember, Patch tests are legal requirements under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, for any hair treatment that involves dye or tint of any kind.



Any hairdresser willing to dye hair without a patch test is **NOT** fulfilling their legal requirements and is certainly **NOT** a safe pair of hands for their customers' hair.

Failure to do a patch test could mean your insurance is invalid and leave you personally liable for damages.

## 20.4 How often should client's hair be patch tested?

It is a requirement that a sensitivity patch test is carried out before certain treatments can be performed.

Any client that has a reaction to the patch test **must not** be allowed to have the full treatment.

Once a client has had a successful patch test, a repeat patch test is required if:

- More than six months has elapsed before the client last had a patch test or a treatment,
- The manufacturer of the products you are using stipulates that a patch test is required more frequently than every six months,

If a person has a negative reaction to the test, **do not** proceed with the planned treatment – patch test a very different product instead.

Always follow the manufacturers' instructions regarding patch testing. If they say a patch test has to be done, then you **must** do one.



## 20.5 Pre-existing medical conditions

A patch test should also be done if a client advises you ( of a change in their medical condition. If a client has had a severe illness including Covid-19), they should be patch tested before a treatment can be given.

If your client has had a COVID-19 vaccine or booster this is classed as a medical change and would require a patch test. A patch test after the second vaccination is not required unless the supplier of the product states otherwise

If you are in any doubt, do a patch test before offering the treatment.

## 20.6 Should I use a consultation form?

The purpose of a consultation form is to fully explain the risks of the treatment to your client.

It can be useful to create a consultation form to ensure your client understand what they're agreeing to. By getting them to sign, you get confirmation that they're happy with the risks involved.

A consultation form should never be used in place of a patch. A patch test still needs to be completed on certain products in order to qualify for insurance.

However, the consultation form can act as a written record of the patch test and can also be used to record any previous allergic reactions experienced by the client, as well as any health problems and medication they may be taking.

## 20.7 How to do a patch test

- A patch test will need to be carried out a minimum of 48 hours prior to a colour application
- A complimentary consultation including the patch test will be booked prior to making the colour appointment
- Once a negative result is received the patch test will be valid for 12 weeks

- The stylist will ask the client a series of questions which will identify if they are suitable to receive a patch test. It is important that the questions are answered honestly
- All instances of the patch test should be recorded. The client should be asked to sign a patch test form which will show they have agreed to the patch test. Keep the form on file.
- A small amount of colour will be applied behind the client's ear (clients should be asked to remove any earrings)
- The colour should be left for a minimum of 48 hours. If the client has a positive reaction the area will become red, itchy and irritated or they may feel unwell. If the client receives a positive reaction, you should inform them to rinse the area immediately, contact the salon and seek medical advice.
- If there is a negative reaction nothing will happen, and it is safe for the client's colour service to take place

## 20.8 Serious side effects if patch test is not done

If a patch test doesn't take place, your client could have a serious reaction.

It could just be an itchy rash or some painful localised swelling.

But in extreme cases :

- Ø their skin may become red, dry, scaly, bumpy, blistered, or irritated (inflamed)
- Ø their skin could react so badly that they're left with a permanent facial scar
- Ø their eyes might swell up so much they can't see, they could have trouble breathing – this is called anaphylactic shock or anaphylaxis, and is a life-threatening emergency
- Ø These symptoms may not show till hours, or even days later. That is why the patch test has to be done at least 48 hours prior to the product itself being used

## 20.9 Black Henna Tattoos

Many permanent and some semi-permanent hair dyes contain a chemical called paraphenylenediamine (PPD). This is a known skin irritant and allergen.

Darker coloured dyes contain higher level of paraphenylenediamine (PPD).



Black henna tattoos often contain very high levels of PPD. Every time a person is exposed to it, the risk of an allergic reaction increases. Even to products they have safely used before.

Therefore, it's very important that you ask your client if they've had a black henna tattoo since their last allergy alert test.



## 20.10 Regulation for paraphenylenediamine (PPD)

Paraphenylenediamine (PPD) is regulated in the UK by the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 2008 ('the UK Cosmetics Regulation' or UKCR), and its subsequent amendments, and The Product Safety and Metrology (Amendment and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2022.

Here are some of the regulations for PPD in the UK:

- Maximum level: PPD can only be used in hair colorants up to a maximum of 2%.
- Labeling: Products containing PPD must be labeled with "Contains phenylenediamines" or "Contains phenylenediamines (toluenediamines)".
- Usage instructions: Products must include clear usage instructions.
- Safety assessment: Cosmetic products and their ingredients must be assessed for safety by a qualified professional before they can be sold.
- Patch tests: Hair salons are required to perform patch tests before applying hair dye.

## 20.11 Non-PPD containing products

It's recommended to patch test products that are labelled as PPD-free, especially if the person has known allergies.

Although some PPD-free products don't require a patch test, it's considered ethical and responsible to do so.

Here are some reasons why you should patch test a product that's labelled as PPD-free:

- PPD-free dyes often use para-toluenediamine sulfate (PTD/PTDS) instead of PPD - people can be allergic to both
- Allergic reactions to hair dye can become more severe over time.

- There are many PPD-free hair dye options available – but check they do not contain other allergens
- Always check the manufacturers' instructions

## 20.12 Client refusal

### **Do not treat a client that refuses a patch test.**



Do not feel pressured by a client into carrying out a treatment without a patch test, or by undertaking a treatment after a reaction to a patch test.

Explain that patch testing is a requirement of undergoing a hair dying or perming treatment at your salon, and this is in line with standard industry practice.

As an industry professional, you have a responsibility to the wellbeing of your client, but you also have a responsibility to yourself and your business. It is better to lose a client by refusing to treat them, than leaving yourself liable to legal action and the financial consequences of this.

Legal advice states that if you agree with a client to circumvent any warranted procedure (i.e., a client refuses a patch test and you go on to perform a treatment that requires a patch test, even if the client signs a waiver), courts will usually award damages against you in any claim then made. In such circumstances, your insurance policy would be invalid.

## 20.13 Signs and symptoms of a hair dye reaction

Reactions to PPD can range from mild irritation in the scalp to an allergic reaction that can potentially trigger serious symptoms throughout the body.

### 20.13.1 Mild Irritation

Signs of a mild irritation could be:

- scalp, neck, forehead, ears and eyelids become irritated and inflamed after using hair dye
- The skin exposed to the PPD may become red, swollen, blistered, dry, thickened and cracked.



- There may be a burning or stinging sensation

Symptoms will usually appear within 48 hours, although strong irritants can cause the skin to react immediately.

### 20.13.2 Allergic Reaction

If a person is allergic to PPD, their scalp and face may feel itchy and start to swell.

PPD may also trigger symptoms throughout the body, such as itching, a rash and generally feeling ill.

These symptoms may not develop until hours or even days later.

#### Anaphylaxis

**A severe allergic reaction** that develops within minutes is called anaphylaxis or “anaphylactic shock”. Signs of anaphylaxis include:



- ❖ Itchy skin or a raised, red skin rash
- ❖ Swollen eyes, lips, hands and feet – the eyelids can swell so much that the eyes close
- ❖ Feeling lightheaded or faint
- ❖ Swelling of the mouth, throat or tongue
- ❖ Breathing and swallowing difficulties
- ❖ Wheezing
- ❖ Stomach pain, nausea and vomiting
- ❖ Collapse and becoming unconscious

### 20.14 What to do if a person has a reaction to the patch test

#### Anaphylaxis

If you suspect someone of going into anaphylactic shock, **call an ambulance straight away**. Give an adrenaline injection if they carry one on them. Give a second injection if the first has not had any positive effect after 5 minutes.

- ✓ If they're still conscious, lie them down on the floor, flat on their back, with their legs raised
- ✓ If they are unconscious but still breathing normally, put them in the recovery position. Keep monitoring them, they could stop breathing
- ✓ If they are unconscious and not breathing, commence CPR and use an AED (automated external defibrillator)

### *Mild symptoms*

- ✓ wash hair and scalp thoroughly with mild shampoo to remove any excess dye
- ✓ gently apply an emollient (moisturising treatment) to the affected skin

### *Steroid cream*

If the skin is very red, sore and inflamed, they may need to try a steroid cream (topical corticosteroid). Tell your customer to purchase a mild steroid cream from a pharmacy, or ask their GP to prescribe a stronger one.

### *Antihistamine medicines*

Medicines called antihistamines can help reduce skin inflammation and itching. Tell your customer to purchase mild antihistamine tablets from a pharmacy or supermarket, or ask their GP to prescribe stronger ones.

### *Avoid products with PPD*

If a person develops a reaction to hair dye, even just a mild one, they should stop using products containing PPD altogether, as there's a risk they could develop a more severe reaction in the future.

Try switching to a safer alternative, such as a non-permanent, PPD-free hair dye – but be aware that it's still possible to develop a reaction to this.

## **20.15 Patch testing in pregnancy**

Patch tests are vital in pregnancy, as hormone changes can cause heightened sensitivity to ingredients. Skin test with the exact colour you're going to use; that way there's no room for error.

Talk through all the options with your client, and suggest she speaks to her GP or midwife first if she has any doubts, or has sensitive skin, has reacted in the past, or an underlying medical issue.

## 20.16 Patch Testing Under 16's

**Children under the age of 16 should never be offered any hair colour or foils service, including initial allergy testing.**

All legal colouring products used in the UK are labelled as "not intended for use on persons under the age of 16".

This does not necessarily mean that they are unsafe to use, but to do so means you will not be following the manufacturer's guidelines, and therefore will not be covered for insurance if anything does go wrong.

Children can often be more sensitive to the chemicals in colour than adults.

Even if you have parental consent, you should not use hair colour on any person under the age of 16.

## 20.17 Resources

For more information, see

[The Cosmetic Products \(Safety\) Regulations 2008](#) (GOV UK)