

Section 12

Patch Testing



12.1 What is Patch Testing

Carrying out a patch test before you colour your hair is an important step to take. A patch test is conducted to discover whether you have any form of reaction to the ingredients contained within the dye.

If you've experienced allergic reactions when colouring your hair in the past, it's essential you perform this step every time you dye your hair, even if you're using a formulation that you've used previously. This is due to potential changes in formulations and ingredients which can vary from batch to batch.



12.2 Patch Testing – What's the Point?

5% or one in twenty people 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 actually be fatal.

Just because you haven't had an allergic reaction before, it doesn't mean you won't in the future as, annoyingly 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 our hair or work more effectively. For most of us this will be a good thing, but a small number of people will find that products they used to have no issues with now cause them irritation. It is therefore really important to keep safe and patch test whether you dye your hair at home or in the salon.

So, although it can be inconvenient to have to go to the hair salon a couple of days before your appointment, a patch test is designed to protect you from harm and is therefore an essential part of the process of colouring your hair.

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



12.3 Why do I need to patch test clients?

If you're a hairdresser, it is a legal requirement under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act to patch test your clients before using a hair colour.

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



**Health and Safety
at Work Act 1974**

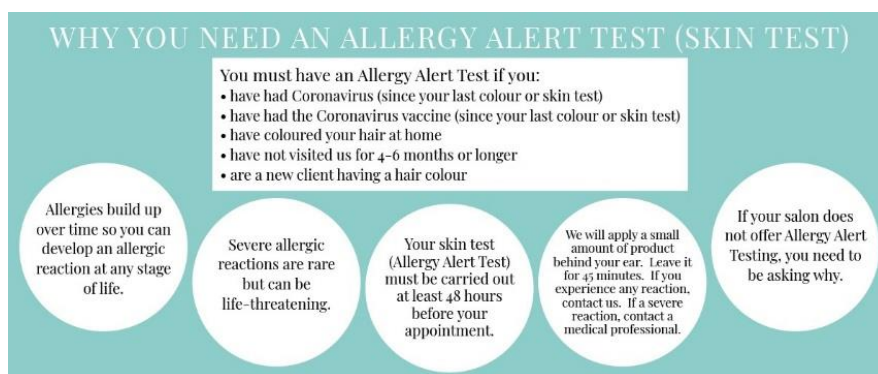
12.4 How often should client's hair be patch tested?

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,
- Your client has had the COVID-19 infection, or
- Your client has had a COVID-19 vaccine or booster



12.5 Medical Conditions & Covid-19

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 infection, 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.



**Post-lockdown
PATCH TESTING**

12.6 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 too, and 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.

Appendix 1

HAIR COLOUR SKIN PATCH TEST
COLOUR CONSENT & WAIVER
(MUST BE AGREED & SIGNED BEFORE ALL COLOURS)

Date: _____ No: _____

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Salon Name: | |
| Salon Address: | |
| Customer Name: | |
| Customer Address: | |
| Customer Tel No: | |

- I am aware & understand that receiving any hair colour service can, in some individuals, cause an allergic reaction.
- I fully understand that this reaction can occur at anytime even if I have received this service on previous occasions.
- I further understand that it is the above-mentioned salons, policy to perform a skin patch test forty-eight (48) hours prior to all colour services.
- I also understand that a negative skin patch test does not mean that a reaction will not still occur.
- I understand these risks and if I have any concerns, I will seek medical advice prior to any colour service.
- Further, I grant the above-mentioned salon permission to colour my hair and not hold them responsible for any, and all adverse reactions from this service.

I ACCEPT A PATCH TEST: YES ☐ NO ☐

I REFUSE A PATCH TEST: YES ☐ NO ☐

| | |
|------------------------|-------|
| AREA OF PATCH TEST: | |
| CUSTOMER NAME (PRINT): | |
| CUSTOMER SIGNATURE: | DATE: |
| PATCH TEST RESULT: | |
| WITNESSED: | DATE: |

12.7 What Is Involved In A Patch Test

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



12.8 What Could Happen If A Patch Test Isn't 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 their eyes might swell up so much they can't see, they could have trouble breathing, or their skin could react so badly that they're left with a permanent facial scar.



12.9 Black Henna Tattoos

It's very important that you ask your client if they've had a black henna tattoo since their last allergy alert test. This is because black henna often contains illegally high levels of the chemical PPD (paraphenylenediamine).

Clients who have had black henna tattoos can subsequently become very sensitive to PPD in hair colour – even if it's a hair colour they've had many times before.

The NHS has issued warnings about black henna tattoos. One woman died from a serious anaphylactic reaction when colouring her hair after having a black henna tattoo five *years* earlier.

[..\\..\\..\\OneDrive\\Pictures\\Saved Pictures\\Patch Test\\BBC News - Julie McCabe hair dye death sparks black henna tattoo warning.html](http://www.bbc.com/news/health-12345678)

Julie McCabe hair dye death sparks black henna tattoo warning



12.10 What Does Patch Testing Test For?

Patch testing is the safest way to test whether your client is prone to a skin reaction called 'contact dermatitis'. This is a type of skin sensitivity that can be triggered when the skin comes into direct contact with certain ingredients. It often results in itching, dryness and irritation that can also cause swelling.

One of the most common causes of contact dermatitis is a chemical called paraphenylenediamine (PPD). This is present in over 99% of hair dyes. Allergies to PPD can occur even when the client has had no previous reaction to it before as they can develop over time. A severe allergic reaction to PPD can also result in allergies to other substances that have never been present before.

However, it's not just dyes containing PPD that you need to patch test for. Some stylists assume products labelled as 'natural' or 'organic' don't require a patch test. This is incorrect – every dye, tint or chemical that will come into contact with the skin needs to be patch tested first.



12.11 What If A Client Refuses A Patch Test?

You should 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. Do not treat a client that refuses a patch test.

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.



12.12 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.

Mild Irritation – If you're mildly irritated by PPD, you may find that your 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. You may feel a burning or stinging sensation.

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

Allergic Reaction – If you're allergic to PPD, your scalp and face may feel itchy and start to swell.

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

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

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, causing breathing and swallowing difficulties
- Wheezing
- Tummy pain, nausea and vomiting
- Collapsing and becoming unconscious

12.13 What To Do If You Have A Reaction

Dial 999 for an ambulance if you think you or someone, you're with is having a severe allergic reaction. Give an adrenaline injection if you have one.

If you think you're experiencing a reaction to hair dye but it's not an emergency, follow this advice:

Relieving mild symptoms

- wash your hair and scalp thoroughly with mild shampoo to remove any excess dye
- try gently applying an emollient (moisturising treatment) such as aqueous cream or petroleum jelly to the affected skin

Steroid cream

If your skin is very red, sore and inflamed, you may need to try a steroid cream (topical **corticosteroid**). You can buy a mild steroid cream at a pharmacy, or a GP may prescribe it. Read more about the treatment of contact dermatitis.

Antihistamine medicines

Medicines called **antihistamines** can help reduce skin inflammation and itching. A pharmacist or GP will be able to recommend an antihistamine for you.

Avoiding products with PPD

If you develop a reaction to hair dye, even just a mild one, you should stop using products containing PPD altogether, as there's a risk you 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.



12.14 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.



12.15 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.

The reason is that 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.



12.16 Further information

Appendix 1 – Colour Skin Patch Test Document

HAIR COLOUR SKIN PATCH TEST COLOUR CONSENT & WAIVER (MUST BE AGREED & SIGNED BEFORE ALL COLOURS)

Date:.....

No:.....

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Salon Name: | |
| Salon Address: | |
| Customer Name | |
| Customer Address | |
| Customer Tel No | |

- I am aware & understand that receiving any hair colour service can, in some individuals, cause an allergic reaction.
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I ACCEPT A PATCH TEST: YES ☐ NO ☐

I REFUSE A PATCH TEST: YES ☐ NO ☐

| | | |
|------------------------|--|-------|
| AREA OF PATCH TEST: | | |
| | | |
| CUSTOMER NAME (PRINT): | | |
| | | |
| CUSTOMER SIGNATURE: | | DATE: |
| | | |
| PATCH TEST RESULT: | | |
| | | |
| WITNESSED: | | DATE: |
| | | |