
Letter to the editor

CARMINE DYE ALLERGY INGREDIENT LABELING

To the Editor:

A statement in the case report "Popsicle-induced anaphylaxis due to carmine dye allergy" by Baldwin et al (Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol 1997; 79:415–419) is inaccurate and could lead to confusion for allergists and dermatologists.

The authors state that, "Foods, cosmetics, and drugs containing these colorants . . . need not bear labels specifying these ingredients." For cosmetics, each ingredient (with exception of flavors and fragrances) must be declared, in descending order of predominance, on the label (21 C.F.R. §701.3). This includes *all* colorants. The section of the C.F.R. cited by the authors pertains to foods, and drugs are "required" only to list active ingredients at this time.

Physicians can therefore continue to advise their patients to "read the label" for cosmetics and personal care products as a sound and sensible part of allergic patient management.

We would appreciate your noting this error in the next issue of your journal.

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Response:

With regard to Dr. McEwen's commentary on our paper, we agree that "For cosmetics, each ingredient (with the exception of flavors and fragrances) must be declared, in descending order of predominance on the label (21 CFR Section 701.3). This includes *all* colorants." We also concur that 21 CFR Section 101, cited in our paper,¹ pertains to foods and drugs.

Despite these points, several trips to cosmetic counters in large department stores in our area have revealed that cosmetics—including lipsticks, eye-shadows, blushes, etc—can be, and routinely are purchased without any ingredient list being voluntarily provided at the counter either on packaging or on separate handout materials unless specifically requested by the customer. This, clearly, makes suspicion and diagnosis of carmine dye allergy less likely, particularly when patients present to their physicians with a product in hand and a package lacking ingredients. We also have found more nebulous "declarations" such as "may contain" followed by a seemingly exhaustive list of known colorants. Although this may meet legal requirements, it does nothing but further complicate and delay the diagnostic process.

Although the prevalence of carmine dye allergy in the general population remains unknown, the potential sever-

ity of reactions to carmine has been well documented.^{1–5} Until clearer, more uniform labeling declaring known allergenic substances like carmine is mandated, carmine avoidance by carmine-allergic individuals and suspicion of carmine allergy with subsequent diagnosis remain problematic.

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