



Surgery Group LA

Specialists based at Cedars-Sinai



REFINERY29

Hair Dye Has Been Linked To Breast Cancer: What You Need To Know

By: Molly Longman | December 5, 2019



We all know someone who's come home from the salon with a hairdo that wasn't exactly a dream. But the real nightmare may not end there — a new study just came out linking permanent hair dye and chemical straighteners with a higher risk of breast cancer. Plus the study, published in the *International Journal of Cancer*, noted that Black women who used these treatments were at an even more increased risk.

The study followed 46,700 American women who were already enrolled in the National Institutes of Health's "Sister Study," which tracks breast-cancer-free women whose biological sisters were diagnosed with cancer. The women, age 35 to 74, answered lifestyle questions (for example, what hair products they used) and updated researchers over an average of eight years. In the end, the study found that women who'd used the dyes and chemical straighteners had a greater chance of being diagnosed with breast cancer. This was especially true if those women identified as Black.



Surgery Group LA

Specialists based at Cedars-Sinai

The researchers found that, compared to those who didn't use dyes at all, women who did had a 9% higher risk of getting breast cancer — but when researchers looked specifically at Black women using dye, they were found to have a 45% higher risk of being diagnosed.

Researchers also discovered women who used chemical straighteners had 18% greater chances of being diagnosed. But a full 74% of the women who said they used this type of treatment were Black; just 3% were white.

This comes two months after the American Cancer Society released their annual breast cancer impact study. It showed that from 2013 to 2017, the breast cancer death rate was 40% higher in Black women than it was in white women, despite slightly fewer Black women actually being diagnosed with the disease.

Before you freak out, experts are saying that much more research needs to be done to confirm whether the link between these hair products and breast cancer is something to be concerned about.

“Like anything else, this is something that would need to be looked into,” says Elizabeth Arena, M.D., Fellow of the American College of Surgeons at the [Surgical Group of Los Angeles](#) at Cedar-Sinai, who specializes in caring for patients with both benign and malignant diseases of the breast. The study only proves that dye and straightening treatments are correlated to an elevated cancer risk, not that they cause it, she says. Other factors could be to blame for the increase.

However, she notes that the findings are “important because they affect so many women, especially in African American women.”

This isn't the first time hair dyes have been linked to cancer, but most studies looking into the specific breast cancer connection have *not* found a link, the ACS points out.

Still... some preliminary research *has* linked hair dye to blood and bladder cancer. One study found that salon employees had small increased risk for bladder and other cancers.



Surgery Group LA

Specialists based at Cedars-Sinai

The research on chemical straighteners and breast cancer is also inconclusive. One large study didn't find any connection between the two. But it used data from the '90s. And as the new IJC study's researchers point out, the keratin treatments that became popular after the 1990s contain or release carcinogen formaldehyde, which could add a new risk.

If anything, this is a reminder to buy and use all your products mindfully. Many cosmetic products don't need the approval of the Food and Drug Administration to be sold — although they do regulate colour additives, *Time Magazine* reports. It might be worth looking into services that help you find cleaner beauty products.

<https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2019/12/8967856/hair-dye-breast-cancer-chemical-straightener>