

HENNA IS NEVER BLACK.

You have probably heard of "black henna." Maybe you've even gotten some. It seems to be henna - it's applied with a cone or bottle like henna, and you pick it off and it leaves a stain. But, unfortunately, "black henna" is anything but henna, or even benign, and it's up to artists and customers alike to help stop the practice of unscrupulous artists who use what we lovingly refer to as "Death Paste."

SO WHAT IS THIS STUFF, IF NOT HENNA?

"Black henna" isn't henna at all - it's usually concentrated black hair dye, also known as PPD. PPD is a coal tar dye with a high contact allergen rate, and was never intended to be used on skin. It is possible to use it a number of times without issue, then suddenly develop a sensitivity to it.

Once a person develops an allergy to PPD, they will have a lifelong sensitivity to products such as various inks, dyed leather and fur, some photographic products, the material that tires are made of, black clothing, sunscreen with paba, and most hair dye. The reactions range from skin scarring and keloids where the contact with the product was made to anaphylaxis (and, potentially, death). Fun fact - PPD was given the dubious honor of being named "Allergen of the Year" in 2006 by the American Contact Dermatitis Society.

WHY DO PEOPLE WANT TO USE THIS STUFF?

- **Because it's a shortcut** - PPD only takes minutes to stain the skin, rather than hours, and you don't have to wait days to see the final color. Some people aren't willing to wait.

- **Because they aren't looking to do "henna,"** they are looking to draw (or receive) a fake tattoo. They want a dark blue or black color to mimic tattooing.

- **Because there are scammy jerks out there** who are only interested in making a buck, not in the safety of their product. They aren't concerned about the hospital trips that the people getting the PPD on their skin might have to make.

- **Because they are ignorant or gullible.** We want to assume the best of people - why would we feel the need to question the smiling artist who wants to draw on us? In many cases, that artist is only using the product that their boss gave them to use, and they are also none the wiser.

- **Because they don't think natural henna will show up** on their darker skin. To a point, this can be true... but that doesn't mean that someone with very dark skin needs to harm themselves with PPD. They can have henna applied in very thick lines, or on their palms and sides of their feet, where the skin is lighter.



There have been countless cases of people, many of them quite young, who have gotten a design in PPD while on Holiday, only to find that they have been scarred for life in the spot where the ink had been applied. This happens most often in the Middle East, South East Asia, Mexico, South America, Africa, and even on the beaches in the United States. Because the reaction often takes days or weeks to surface, the family is usually back home and is powerless to fight the artist or company who offered the PPD as art.

BUT THEY'RE TELLING ME IT'S PERFECTLY SAFE.....

Here's the thing, folks. If someone tries to tell you that the stuff they are going to put on you is perfectly safe, but they refuse to tell you what's in it, then they either don't know what they're talking about or they are lying. Either way, it's your right to walk away. There is no "magic mehendi stone." Or a special blend of herbs. Or a safe black pigment. Why chance it? Look at the photos on this page, find countless others online, and tell me that it's worth the risk.

"But my family has used this stuff for years, and we're all fine...."

One of these times, someone is not going to be fine. Would you want it to be you? Or your child?

ABOUT THAT "INSTANT HENNA" STUFF...

You've probably seen, or someone has tried to sell you that stuff that appears to be henna, but is in a plastic tube. Brands such as Rani, Golecha, Ruhani, Satrana, Singh, Indian Ethnic House, and hundreds more sell it. This stuff may not have PPD in it, but remember that henna is perishable, and doesn't stain instantly - meaning that these tubes or cones have other chemicals (either used as dyes or preservatives) that are likely not safe for use on skin. Some henna cones from India have kerosene or gasoline in them.

We recommend, if you are an artist and you prefer not to mix your own paste, that you order pre-made cones from a supplier who can tell you exactly what is in the paste, ship it fresh (from within your country), and tell you how to store it once it gets to you in order to preserve it.

HOW TO TELL IF THE "HENNA" ISN'T HENNA

Scenario one: You're on vacation, and you see someone advertising "henna tattoos."

1. Look around for signs that say "black henna" or "colored henna."
2. Ask the artist what color the final stain will be. The answer should be "brown." Not black, red, brown, blue, or gray.
3. Ask the artist what color the stain will be when you first pick off the paste. The answer should be "orange." Not black, red, brown, blue, gray, or brown. Why not brown? Because having a brown stain immediately after paste removal means that there is probably brown hair dye, PPD, in the paste.
4. Ask the artist how long you should leave the paste on your skin after application. The answer should be *at least* two hours.
5. Ask the artist what they have in their paste. If they are unwilling or unable to answer you, politely decline. If they can't pronounce the ingredients, or claim that it's a "secret family recipe," politely decline. If you're feeling froggy, tell them why you're declining.



Scenario two: You're at the local Indo-Pak store, and you see a tube of stuff that says "henna."

1. Does the tube say "Instant" on it? Then it's garbage.
2. Does it say "black henna" or any other color henna? Poison.
3. Is most of the label in Hindi or Urdu, except for the English with typos? Junk.
4. Does it say "for hair" on it? Probably PPD. Even if it also has pictures of henna'd hands.

Actually, if you find coned henna in a store, it's probably going to be chemical-laden or PPD, unless it was made locally and has been kept frozen.

ONE LAST THING....

You may also encounter "colored henna" while shopping around. This is usually normal henna with food dyes added to it that give it a tint, but don't last much longer than a day. It's basically worthless. Not dangerous, per se, but pointless.

My opinion? If you want color, then use facepaint, or Temptu, or get an actual tattoo.... but don't ask henna to be anything except the reddish brown loveliness that she is.

