

## Dying to be beautiful - the hair dye health hazard

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Last month, Julie McCabe, 38, coloured her hair with a best-selling home dye kit, just like she'd done many times in the past. But unlike before, this time she was left fighting for survival on life support.

Julie's family believe the mum-of-two may have had a severe allergic reaction to the chemical p-Phenylenediamine (PPD) in the product.

Her devastated father, Keith Miller, said: "I promise, for the sake of my daughter and other women, to get this chemical outlawed in Britain.

"I don't want this happening to anybody else."

Julie's case came just weeks after Tabatha McCourt, 17, died following what is also suspected to be an extreme allergy to home hair dye.

While the exact cause in both cases is still being investigated, similar reactions have happened to a number of other women in recent years and some experts fear they are on the rise.

One such case was Zoe Vernon, 24, a shop assistant whose home hair dye session two years ago left her with such dreadful injuries that she ended up on a drip for three days in a special care unit.

Covered in horrific burns and weeping blisters, Zoe, from Oldham, Greater Manchester, was rushed to hospital by ambulance.

"I was in agony and my eyes were so swollen I couldn't see," she says.

"When, after four days in hospital, I could finally look in the mirror I'll never forget what I saw. I felt like a monster – it was horrendous. I was certain I'd be scarred for life."

Thankfully, the special burns unit at Manchester's Wythenshawe Hospital was prepared for cases as extreme as Zoe's – even if hair dye isn't the usual cause.

"I was given a cocktail of drugs including really strong painkillers and anti-inflammatories," she says. "They basically treated me as if I'd been in a fire."

Miraculously, Zoe went on to make a full recovery and was left with no scarring, but she'll never forget her experience. "I feel so lucky after hearing about the poor girl who died recently and the mum in a coma – I'll never touch hair dye again."

Paula Pratt, 40, who lives in Bognor Regis, West Sussex, suffered a similar ordeal to Zoe's. She used home hair dye to cover a few grey hairs in 2009, but ended up in hospital with her head so swollen it resembled a rugby ball.

"My husband Neil was horrified – my head was three times its normal size and my scalp was oozing clear fluid everywhere," she says. "The swelling started travelling down my throat as well and it was hard to breathe normally. It was terrifying."

Doctors had to use the strongest possible dose of steroids and antihistamines to finally control the reaction. She says: "I've been told I can never dye my hair again – but that's OK, I'd rather go grey than risk my life."

While such extreme reactions remain rare, there's growing concern that the rise in home dyeing and allergies in general could result in more cases in the future.

Chemists and supermarkets sell around 50 million boxes of dye a year, while figures from Allergy UK show the number of allergy sufferers has tripled in the past 20 years.

"We don't know why these allergies are increasing," admits hair and scalp expert, trichologist Sara Allison. "However, it's possible that the introduction of chemicals the body isn't used to make it react in such a way."

For hair dyes, that chemical is PPD. Present in almost all hair colour, it causes 80% of allergic reactions, according to the European Scientific Committee on Consumer Products.

PPD is used to fix dye permanently so it doesn't wash out – and the darker the hair colour, the more it contains.

EU law permits PPD in hair dyes at specific levels with the necessary warning labels, but some countries, including Germany, have already banned the ingredient.

In 2007, an article in the British Medical Journal called for more research into the safety of hair dyes.

Although life-threatening allergic reactions to PPD only affect around one in 250,000 people, what makes the condition so frightening is that anybody can develop an extreme reaction.

This was certainly the case for Zoe, who had been dyeing her hair for six years without any problems, so saw no need to do a patch test, as suggested on the packet.

"The next morning I woke up with an itchy, swollen face, which gradually got worse until it was agonisingly painful," she says. "I couldn't believe it – I had used dye so many times before."

So why did Zoe react in this way? The answer lies in how allergies develop.

If a person is introduced to a potential allergen, such as PPD, often no noticeable reaction will take place at first, but the body has still produced antibodies.

The next time they're exposed to the substance, the antibodies are activated, triggering an allergic reaction.

"The problem is there's no way of knowing when you could become sensitised," explains Lindsey McManus of Allergy UK. "It could be the second or 50th time you dye your hair."

And while most reactions aren't serious, having a mild allergic reaction puts you at higher risk of developing a more severe one next time, so experts advise avoiding hair dye if you experience any symptoms.

The most severe cases lead to anaphylactic shock, which involves the whole body. While this is rare, it can cause swelling, breathing difficulties and can even prove fatal.

Samantha Devlin, 33, from Luton, Bedfordshire, was one of the lucky ones to be warned about her PPD allergy before a reaction developed.

“I’d gone to A&E with my hands swollen like a bunch of bananas,” she says. “They told me I’d become so sensitised that I had to quit hairdressing or I could be dead by 21.”

Samantha had trained as a hairdresser in her teens, handling dye on a daily basis, but after moving to a busier salon, she found her hands became sore.

“My knuckles split and my fingers were covered in angry red patches that started to spread up my arms, then on to my neck and face,” she says.

“When I tried to put dye on my own hair it was worse – my scalp ended up covered in burns and oozing blisters.”

Doctors first diagnosed Samantha with eczema, but eventually identified a severe PPD allergy. She was forced to give up hairdressing and 15 years later has been left with a multitude of other allergies.

She’s even allergic to the dye in clothing and has ended up back in hospital after her shoes made her feet blister.

“I’d tell all women to do a patch test beforehand,” she warns. “And if they have the slightest tingle – get allergy tested. You can’t mess around with it.”

FOR ADVICE, VISIT [WWW.ALLERGYUK.ORG](http://WWW.ALLERGYUK.ORG)



Looks safe for how long?

Janet's Comment:

Is it really worth it? I'm choosing to stay natural. Sometimes there are a few quality herbal tints that can be bought from a Health Store or Online. Be selective with the product you buy.

PS Note: I just found this really good Site!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

<http://www.getawaygrey.com/blog/category/natural-anti-gray-treatments>