

# Pretty dangerous

Many beauty products are touted to be kid-friendly now but experts say not all are safe

**Karen Tée**

**M**odern mums are not content with having their kids dress like them. Some even doll them up to look like their mini-me. Case in point: Suri Cruise, the five-year-old daughter of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, is often photographed wearing bright pink lipstick or shimmery lipgloss.

Like how many fashion brands have spun off children's lines, the beauty industry has also moved beyond the usual Johnson's Baby.

Kiddie offerings these days range from Hello Kitty lip balms to fruit-scented bubble washes from Disney to baby night sprays from cult labels such as Milk Baby from Australia that are said to help them sleep better.

A spokesman for Robinsons says the department store now carries seven brands of such baby products, up from just two in 2009. It also saw a 60 per cent jump in sales between 2009 and last year.

Over at Watsons, which carries about 10 beauty brands with kids' products, a spokesman notes that mothers these days "are more concerned with appearances and want their children to look well groomed".

Ms Evelyn Tan, 36, let her daughter wear clear lip-glosses and lip balms when she was five years old.

"She asked me about them when she observed me putting on make-up," says the brand manager of a cosmetics company, whose daughter is now seven. "She puts them on when she plays dress-up at home or when she goes out, as glosses and balms make her feel like she is wearing lipstick."

But she is careful about the brands she picks. "If the products are from a brand that I am unfamiliar with, I will check where they are made and read the ingredients' list. Her safety is my top concern. I don't want her to accidentally ingest products that may cause allergic reactions."

To make the cut as kid-friendly, dermatologists say beauty products should be free of fragrances, colouring and contain gentler formulations that have been tested to be safe for children.

Dr Jean Ho, consultant dermatologist at Jean Ho Skin and Laser Clinic at Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre, says they should also have a lower concentration of active ingredients. These are what make a product effective. For example, the active ingredient in a shampoo would be the cleansing agent.

The thinner skin of children is more prone to irritation, produces less protective sebum and thus absorbs greater amounts of chemicals.

Not all balms that tout themselves as kid-friendly are safe, though.

Suri Cruise (right), daughter of actors Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes, may be just five but she is often seen wearing either lipstick or lipgloss – products doctors say children should use sparingly and carefully.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Dr Ho says: "Going by the ingredients' list, quite a number of so-called products for babies or kids are no different from regular adult products, which can be more irritating to kids' skin."

These ingredients include parabens, formaldehydes and 1,4-dioxane. Doctors say they get occasional cases of children with contact dermatitis due to product use, but do not have specific figures.

A 2007 article by the American-based Environmental Working Group, a non-profit organisation that advocates for safer beauty products, reports that the average child is exposed through bodycare products to 27 chemicals a day that are not proven to be safe for kids. These include products that are marketed for them.

Doctors also advise parents to keep their daughters away from make-up for as long as possible.

Unlike shampoos or body washes, which are rinsed off within minutes and therefore have minimal contact with the skin, make-up stays on the face for long periods of time.

Dr Regina Lim, consultant dermatologist at Changi General Hospital's Department of Dermatology, says the earlier a child is exposed to cosmetics, the more likely it is that she will develop contact dermatitis to ingredients in the make-up.

When in doubt, use

Dr Veronica Toh, a p  
dren's Centre at Raffle  
wait till a child is 12 be  
such as lipgloss and eye

It is best to hold off  
and foundations that w  
puberty, she adds, beca  
child is undergoing ho  
ucts contain oil and ot  
pores and cause acne," s

There could also be  
from using make-up too

Consultant psychia  
should be careful about  
by letting their kids use

"Many children wan  
their favourite actor or s  
increase your child's cor  
ly," he says.

"It starts with make  
focus on sexier clothin  
push them to grow up s

✉ [karentee@sph.com](mailto:karentee@sph.com)

# ROUS



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

## ST MAGAZINES' CONTRIBUTIONS

There will be contributions from The Straits Times Magazines – Digital Life, Mind Your Body, Urban, IN and Little Red Dot – in the Family pages each week. Digital Life is published every Wednesday, Mind Your Body on Thursday and Urban on Friday. IN and Little Red Dot are distributed weekly to school subscribers.

ingredients' list, quite a few for babies or kids are no products, which can be

parabens, formaldehydes they get occasional cases of dermatitis due to product use, es.

can-based Environmental organisation that advocates reports that the average care products to 27 chemicals to be safe for kids. These are tested for them.

s to keep their daughters safe as possible.

washes, which are rinsed off before have minimal contact on the face for long periods.

dermatologist at Changi General Hospital of Dermatology, says that cosmetics, the more like contact dermatitis to ingredients.

When in doubt, use less, advises Dr Ho.

Dr Veronica Toh, a paediatrician at the Raffles Children's Centre at Raffles Hospital, advises parents to wait till a child is 12 before allowing her to use make-up such as lipgloss and eyeshadow.

It is best to hold off on products such as powders and foundations that will cover the entire face till after puberty, she adds, because this is the time when the child is undergoing hormonal changes. "These products contain oil and other ingredients that may clog pores and cause acne," she says.

There could also be psychological repercussions from using make-up too early.

Consultant psychiatrist Brian Yeo says parents should be careful about the message they are sending by letting their kids use make-up.

"Many children want to wear make-up to emulate their favourite actor or singer but... you do not want to increase your child's consciousness of sexuality too early," he says.

"It starts with make-up, then they'll move on to focus on sexier clothing and their body shape. Why push them to grow up so fast?"

✉ [karentee@sph.com.sg](mailto:karentee@sph.com.sg)

## Beauty products for kids: Dos and don'ts

### Dos

■ Body lotions and creams can protect the skin barrier and are recommended for infants and kids, especially those who have dry skin or eczema.

■ Start with a baby oil or fragrance- and colour-free moisturiser containing wax, glycerine and petroleum jelly. Within a few months, these can be substituted with a lotion or cream.

■ Read the ingredients' list carefully and avoid products that contain formaldehyde, parabens, fragrance, sodium lauryl sulfate, isothiazolinones and propylene glycol. They can irritate the skin and may lead to the child developing contact dermatitis, an allergic rash.

■ Choose "no-tears" shampoos that are formulated for children as they are generally gentler formulations.

■ Get sunscreens that are made of zinc oxide, which is a mineral that provides protection against UVA and UVB radiation. Avoid those that contain chemicals such as benzophenone and oxybenzone as these are suspected carcinogens.

### Don'ts

■ Avoid bubble baths, even if they are labelled "for kids", as harsh chemicals are used to create the suds. The harsh detergents can weaken the skin's natural protective barrier by stripping it of its natural oils. Choose a creamy, fragrance-free body cleanser with low suds instead.

■ Do not use sunscreen on children below six months as their skin may absorb too much of the product. Instead, let your baby wear a hat and long-sleeved clothing, and limit his exposure to direct sunlight.

■ Avoid products that contain nano or micro-nised ingredients as these are formulated to better penetrate the skin. While harmless to adults, they could damage brain cells in children as their thinner skin tends to be more absorbent.

■ Do not let your child use make-up such as lipgloss till she is at least 12 years old to avoid allergic reactions. Prepubescent teens should avoid using powders and foundations as these cosmetics contain ingredients that may clog pores.

Sources: Dr Jean Ho, consultant dermatologist at Jean Ho Skin and Laser Clinic at Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre; Dr Regina Lim, consultant dermatologist at Changi General Hospital's Department of Dermatology; and Dr Veronica Toh, paediatrician at the Raffles Children's Centre at Raffles Hospital