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## Watch out for synthetic stuff, it's damaging

Yogesh Kumar



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**New Delhi:** The mood is set. It's time to celebrate Holi. Serious revellers are busy stocking pucca colours that won't come off easily. And thanks to that, the market for synthetic colours is flourishing. But here, doctors have a word of advice. While they may add to the fun, the synthetic colours, comprising harmful chemicals and dyes, may not only damage the skin but can also result in other serious medical conditions.

Doctors add that most Holi staples like gulal and soluble colours have high lead content, which can get absorbed in the blood. Though there is no fear of immediate blood toxicity, the absorption is faster if a wound is exposed. "Neurological and blood toxicity are common due to excess use of lead. As lead gets absorbed in the blood, it can cause serious damage when used long term. In case of an abrasion on the skin, these chemical-based colours get absorbed faster. One should avoid ingesting colours," said Dr Neena Khanna, professor of dermatology, AIIMS. Another common Holi accessory is glitter, which, doctors say, should be avoided at all cost. "It contains silica or fine glass particles that can result in abrasions on the skin accompanied by irritation or serious allergy," said Dr Khanna.

Other than lead, synthetic colours available in the market also contain high levels of silica, chromium, bromide, mercury, and acidic and alkaline material. They can cause serious skin problems. "Herbal colours are the best. Synthetic colours lead to contact allergies, which can aggravate if further exposed to sunlight or other chemicals. A lot of people paint themselves with dark colours, which can damage the skin. If synthetic colours are left on the skin for long, they can irritate," said Dr Deepak Vohra, senior consultant dermatologist, Rockland Hospital.

While herbal colours are fast climbing the popularity ladder, synthetic colours still rule the market as people are suspicious about the quality of herbal colours. Experts suggest it is best to make colours at home. One can use turmeric, coffee, besan, vegetables and dry flowers to get the desired colour. "Dried flowers can be mixed with any flour to get the right colour," said Dr Charulata Bose, consultant dermatologist, Artermis Healthcare Institute.

Salts and compound used in synthetic colours are toxic. "Copper sulphate, which is used in green colour, is toxic. Ingesting a small amount will not do much damage, but one has to be very careful. A lot of people can suffer from allergic skin reactions," said Dr Mukesh Girdhar, senior consultant, Max Healthcare. Asthma patients need to be more careful since dry synthetic colours can aggravate breathing problems. One also needs to be careful with balloons.

toireporter@timesgroup.com