

Criteria for allergy-friendly cosmetics

Basic situation

Cosmetics occasionally cause allergic reactions due to substances they may contain that serve as preservatives or perfumes. The ECARF Seal of Quality designates cosmetics as suitable for use by allergy sufferers when the manufacturer can demonstrate that effective quality control measures are in place. These measures must include monitoring of the substances included and of product composition as well as consumer tests and effective complaint management.

Cosmetics are certified by ECARF if they can demonstrate in scientific tests that reactions to the products are not expected, and that there is no perceived risk of developing a new allergy. Despite careful product composition and testing, the risk of an allergic reaction can never be completely eliminated. Manufacturers of ECARF-certified cosmetics document the following tests for their products:

1. Formulation and ingredients

Allergy-friendly cosmetic products must not contain irritating ingredients beyond the irritation threshold. This property needs to be confirmed by use tests as described below. It is essential for all cosmetic product categories, that the products may contain only ingredients which have in no case an allergenic potential in the used concentration.

Furthermore, depending on the cosmetic product category, additional standards are required:

- Fragrances: In 1999, the SCCNFP identified a set of 26 fragrance allergens with a higher potential to cause allergies in comparison to other fragrances. These 26 Fragrances must not be contained in ECARF certified products.
- Preservatives: Preservatives should be used with utmost modesty and at the lowest possible effective concentrations. Methylisothiazolinone, Kathon CG (MCI/MI) and/or Iodopropynylbutylcarbamate cannot be contained in any formulations.

ECARF dermatologists and allergists evaluate the formulation and ingredients of cosmetic products for quality and safety, based on the criteria listed above as well as on the basis of international standards.

2. User tests

Through user tests, the product is shown to be acceptable for persons with highly sensitive, eczematous skin. This is tested according to normal product use by at least 20 patients of the respective user group with medically diagnosed atopic dermatitis demonstrating sensitive skin. The period of use for the test varies according to product type. If over the course of seven days no deterioration of skin condition is noted in any of the subjects, the product is generally considered acceptable for sensitive skin.

3. Quality Control and Complaint Management

The manufacturer has established a functional system of quality control that responds effectively to consumer complaints. The following components are in place:

- contact information such as manufacturer telephone number or e-mail address are easy to find on the packaging of the product;
- a personal response by experienced personnel is guaranteed in the case of any complaint;
- an efficient structure is in place through which complaints are systematically catalogued, assessed and used to improve product security. The producer agrees to make these data constantly available to ECARF and to present a suggestion for improvement in the case of unexpected problems;
- an efficient system for providing ECARF dermatologists with test materials for a patch test, in case suspicion of a contact allergy triggered by the product should arise.