

All shades are worthy:

Connecting colorism, skin lightening products, and your health



What I will **learn**:

How skin lightening products can be bad for my health

How to read and understand the labels on skin lightening products

What is colorism

How factors like colorism can affect how I and others think about beauty

How the use of skin lightening products is an environmental justice issue

Skin lightening products come in many forms

- Creams, lotions, soaps, pads, or injectables
- Sometimes labeled as “bleaching,” “evening,” “correcting,” “blemish-fading,” or other names



Skin lightening products are sources of potentially **toxic chemicals**

Skin lightening products on your **body** means **toxic chemicals** in your body

Your baby is also exposed to **toxic chemicals** when you use skin lightening products



HYDROQUINONE in skin lightening products is **DANGEROUS**

HYDROQUINONE can cause these health problems:

**Blurry vision &
other eye damage**



**Skin discoloration and rash -
Ochronosis**



Skin cancer



HYDROQUINONE from your doctor is **SAFE**

Hydroquinone is **SAFE** to use in products
from your doctor



Hydroquinone is **not SAFE**
in products you buy
yourself



MERCURY in skin lightening products is **DANGEROUS**

MERCURY in skin lightening products can cause these health problems:

Headaches, memory loss & other nervous system damage



Skin discoloration & scarring



Kidney damage

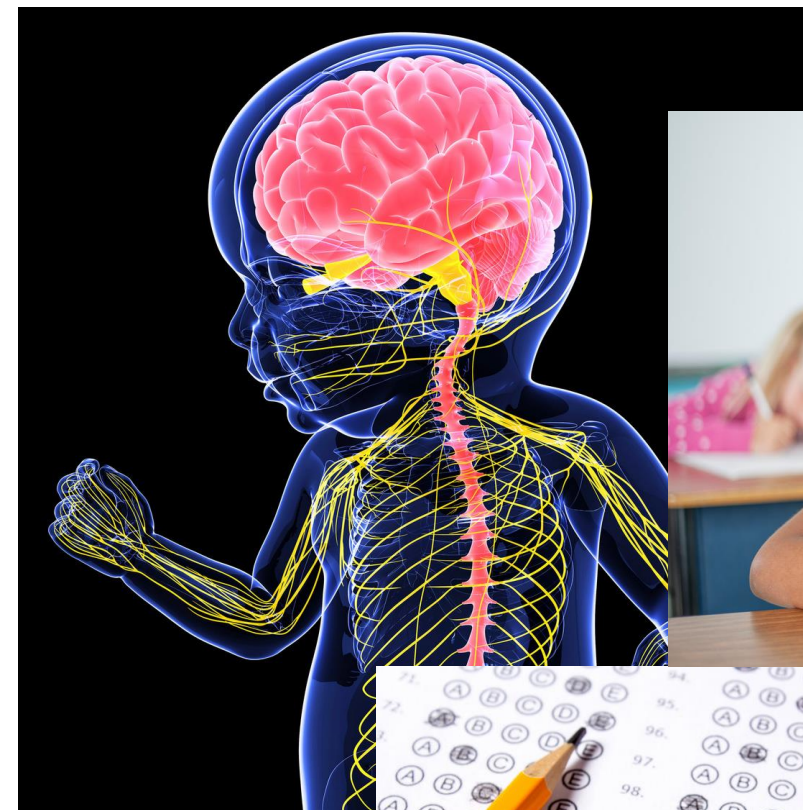


Your **kids** can be exposed to **MERCURY** in skin lightening products, too

Mercury can damage your child's nervous system and can cause learning and memory problems



U.S. government and state of NY have **BANNED** mercury in skin lightening products



STERIODS in skin lightening products are **DANGEROUS**

STERIODS in skin lightening products can cause these health problems:

High blood pressure,
leading to heart
problems



Skin damage, acne, and painful
skin sores



High blood sugar,
leading to diabetes



How to avoid potentially toxic skin lightening products while shopping?





Read the labels of your products

Try to **avoid** products with some of the most toxic chemicals



AVOID
products with
these
chemicals
listed on them

1. MERCURY

2. HYDROQUINONE

3. STERIODS

Read your labels



Some products won't have **MERCURY** listed on the label, but other names for **MERCURY**

1.MERCURY

AVOID products
with these
chemicals

Other names:

Hg

Mercuric iodide

Mercuric chloride

Mercurous chloride

Ammoniated mercury

Calomel

Mercurio

Amide chloride of mercury or mercury oxide

Read your labels



Some products won't have mercury listed on the label, but these instructions are a sign of **MERCURY**

Signs of
products with
MERCURY

AVOIDS PRODUCTS that tell
you avoid contact with silver,
gold, rubber, aluminum and
jewelry

Products with mercury will
ruin your jewelry

Read your labels



Tips for when you shop

Read your labels



LOOK OUT for products with different names but similar promises

These products might also expose you to **HYDROQUINONE, MERCURY, or STERIODS** which are **DANGEROUS**

Tips for when you shop

Be skeptical of products with:



Missing product label?

**Handmade product label
or label with handwriting
on it?**

These products may not have ingredient information listed, so you can't do a proper **label check**



HOME

WHO
WE
ARE

WHAT
WE DO

GET
INVOLVED

LATEST

VOTE

JUSTICE40RV

New York state has **BANNED**
the sale of **cosmetics and**
personal care products
containing mercury

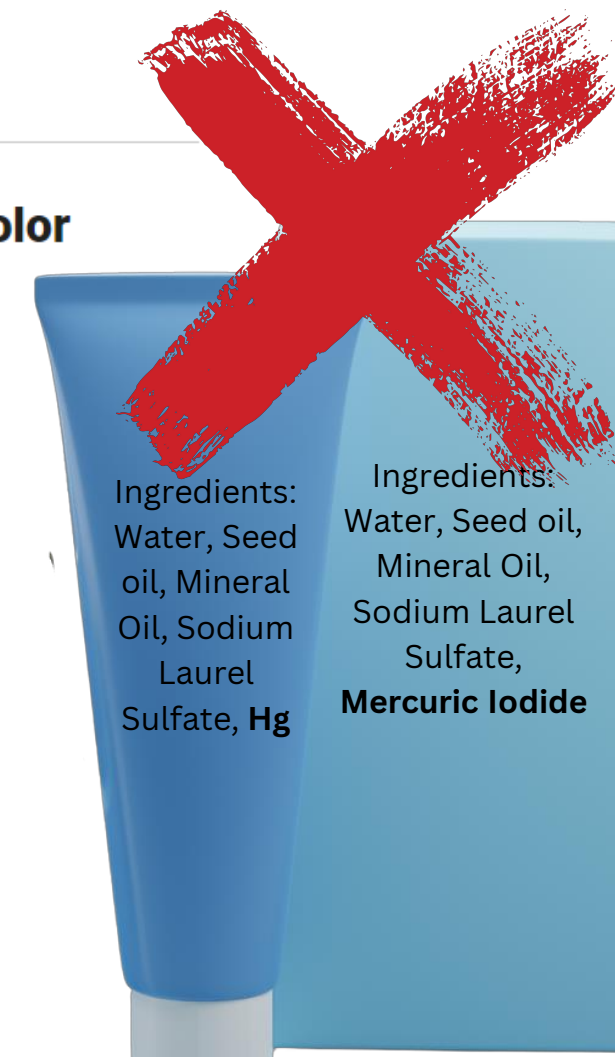
Governor Hochul Bans Sale of Personal Care Products Containing Mercury

Mercury is a Neurotoxin Used in Skin Lightening Creams Marketed to People of Color

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For use until modified or study is closed



Your zip code matters when shopping for products

Where you live can affect your ability to find products that are not toxic



Your zip code matters when shopping for products

WE ACT staff visited stores in **Northern Manhattan** and found that **local salons and small beauty stores commonly sold toxic products**



Environmental racism in the beauty industry

Fighting environmental racism in the beauty industry is similar to the fight for **social justice issues**, like **LGBTQIA+ rights** and **rights for migrants**



People of color deserve to
have **ACCESS** to **safe**
environments, living
spaces and non-toxic
personal care products



Products with toxic chemicals in them, like skin lighteners, are disproportionately marketed and used by women of color

That is NOT justice

Environmental racism in the beauty industry

What does beauty look like?



22 years of covers!



Historically, we have been taught that beauty only looks a certain way



**BEAUTY
is
diverse**



Racism has glorified certain beauty features, like light and fair skin



Skin lightening products are marketed as the answer



Skin lightening products can be **dangerous** to your health and your child's health



**Skincare products
are marketed as the
answer**



Colorism affects a lot us

- Colorism is discrimination based on skin color
- Colorism is the belief that light or fairer skin is better and people with it have more attractive features and qualities



Source: [Norwood 2015](#)

Colorism affects a lot us

"YOU ARE
PERCEIVED AS
BEAUTIFUL, CLEAN
AND A MUCH
BETTER PERSON"

CNN, White Lies

"YOU WILL NOT BE
SELECTED [FOR THE
JOB]"

CNN, White Lies

"TAUNTED, TEASED,
HARASSED AND
LOOKED DOWN
UPON "

CNN, White Lies

62% of U.S.
Latinos said
having darker
skin hurts
their ability
to get ahead

Pew Research Center



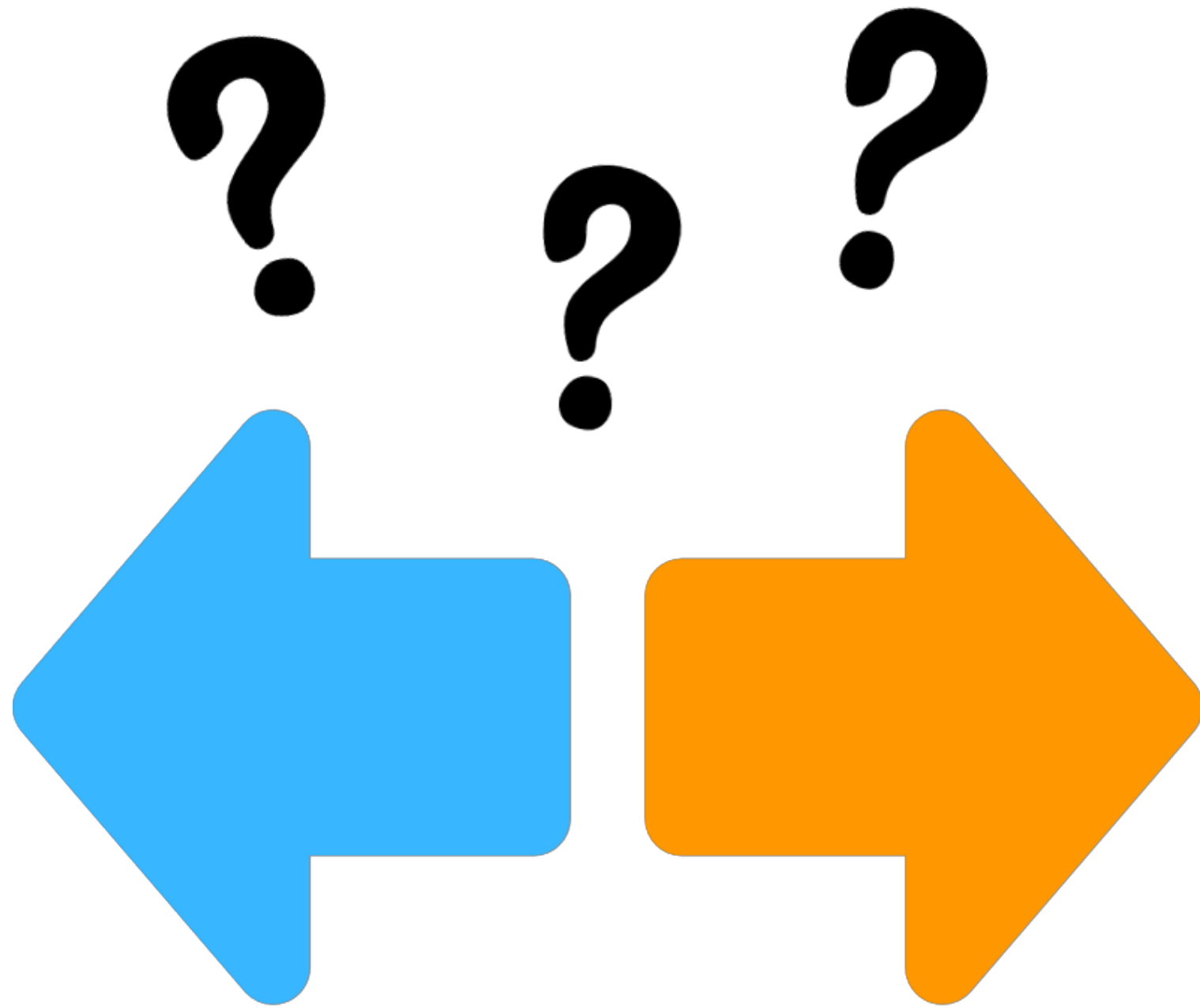
Women of color in Northern Manhattan
and South Bronx in a survey said:

LIGHT SKIN makes a woman
look more **beautiful**

LIGHT SKIN makes a woman
look **younger**

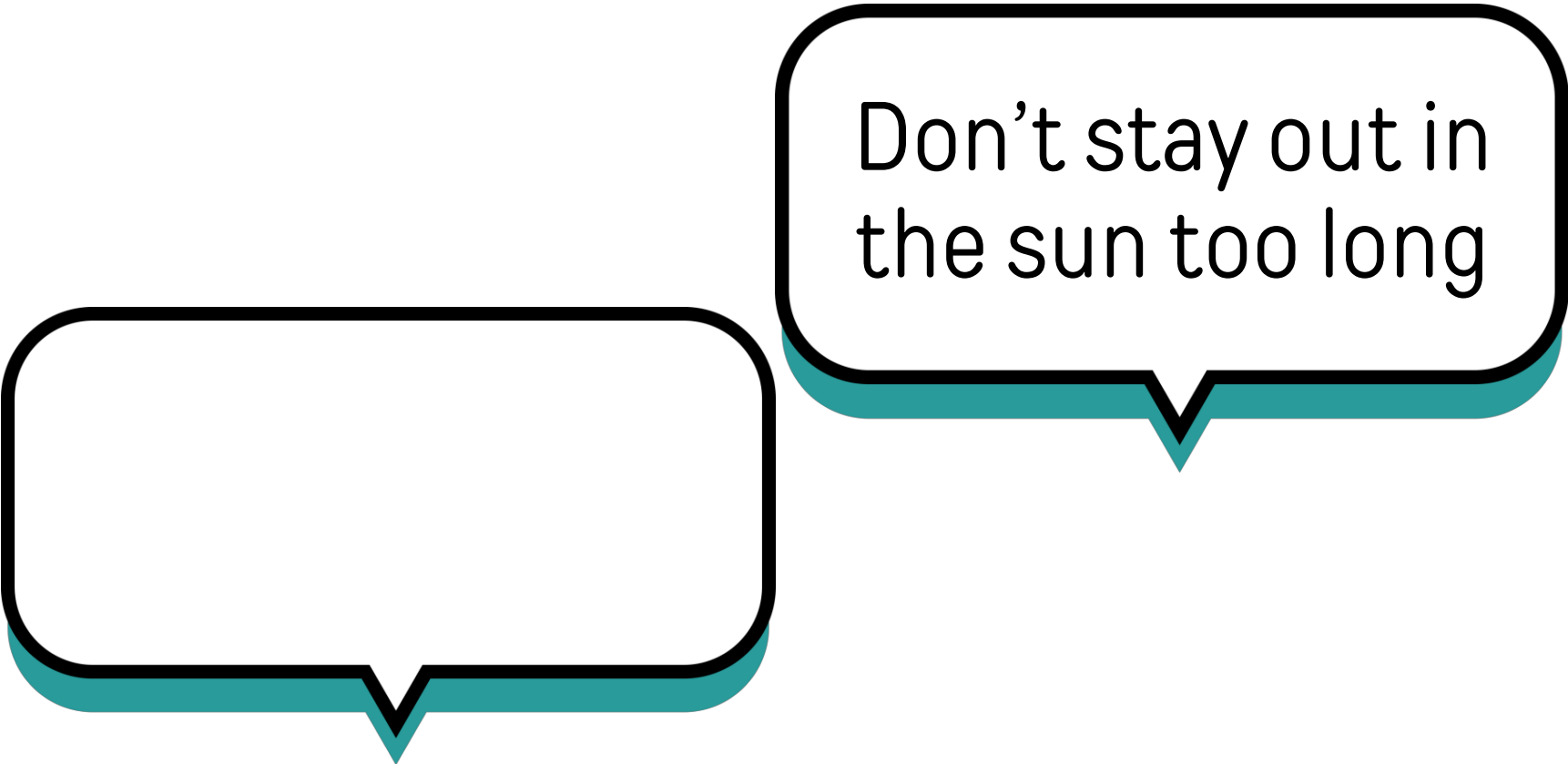
What can you do?

Hard conversations with yourself and others



- Balancing societal pressures, personal agency, and potential harm
- Figuring out the right decision for you is **personal** and can be **difficult**

Words matter



Don't stay out in
the sun too long

- Choose your words carefully when talking to others – *especially when you are commenting on someone's skin*
- We often say words or phrases that perpetuate the idea that fair or light skin is favorable

Focus on areas where you can take **ACTION**

READ



**AVOID products with
MERCURY, HYDROQUINONE,
and/or STERIODS listed on the
label**

YOUR

MERCURY might not be on
the label, but look for its
other names

LABELS

MERCURY might not be on
the label, but if the product
says to avoid contact with
jewelry, then that's a sign
there's **MERCURY**



Focus on areas where you can take **ACTION**

READ



Different names, same products

Look out for other names for skin lightening products

YOUR



Be skeptical of products with NO product label or handwriting on the label

LABELS

Use these tips to check the products you currently have at home



Focus on areas where you can take **ACTION**

People of color deserve to have **ACCESS** to non-toxic or non dangerous personal care products. People of color deserve to thrive and feel beautiful in every skin tone.

Racism tries to make us believe that only fair skin is beautiful and creates pressure to use dangerous skin lightening products - **BEAUTY** is diverse

Small changes can begin with sharing what you learned with others

**BLACK &
BROWN
FREEDOM**



Resources

- FDA Skin Facts! – www.fda.gov/SkinFacts
- NYC Health Hazardous Products: Mercury in Soaps and Creams – <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/mercury-in-soaps-and-creams.page>
- The Beautywell Project
 - Information about products – www.thebeautywell.org/data/database/
 - Informational videos and materials – www.thebeautywell.org/data/knowledge-hub/