

**SkinFacts!**

What You Need to Know About  
SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS

FDA



SKIN FACTS! INITIATIVE  
**Partner Toolkit**

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## About the **SkinFacts!** Initiative

The FDA Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (OMHHE) launched [Skin Facts!](#) to raise consumer awareness about potentially harmful effects from the use of skin lightening products containing the ingredients hydroquinone or mercury. These products are often marketed to racial and ethnic minority groups to lighten or “even” skin tone and treat conditions like dark spots, acne, and wrinkles. Regular application can lead to skin rashes, facial swelling, skin discoloration, and even poisoning. The over-the-counter sale of skin lightening products containing hydroquinone or mercury is illegal, and consumers are advised not to use these products due to health risks.

**Skin Facts!** resources provide helpful tips for avoiding products that may contain hydroquinone or mercury. We encourage consumers to report bad reactions from the use of skin lightening products to [MedWatch](#), the FDA’s medical product safety reporting program, and consult with their health care provider for prescription medication to treat skin conditions.

The **Skin Facts!** Toolkit includes a list of social media messages and graphics to share with your social media audiences. You can also find resources at OMHHE’s [Skin Facts!](#) page, including a public service announcement and educational materials.

### How To Use This Toolkit

- ➔ **Share our messages and digital resources on social media.**  
Copy and paste our Twitter and Facebook messages into your social media posts for your audiences. You can use our initiative messages with the downloadable digital images and videos based on your preferences.
- ➔ **Use the hashtag [#FDASkinFacts](#) to help promote the initiative.**  
Also consider using the secondary hashtag [#SkinLightening](#) to connect with consumers who use these products.
- ➔ **Tag [@FDAHealthEquity](#) on Twitter to increase the reach of the initiative.**
- ➔ **Follow us on social media!**  
U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (OMHHE)
  - [Facebook: U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#)
  - [Twitter: @FDAHealthEquity](#)

Get the Skin Facts! by visiting [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts).

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## Sample Social Media Messages: Facebook

- The use of nonprescription skin lightening products containing hydroquinone may cause blue-black skin discoloration (also known as ochronosis). Get the skin facts at: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts). **#FDASkinFacts #SkinLightening**
- Mercury is an odorless, invisible toxin used in illegal skin lightening products. Learn about the health risks of mercury and how to avoid exposure in skin lighteners: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) **#FDASkinFacts**
- Buyer beware! Skin lightening products sold over the counter may contain ingredients that can damage your skin and harm your health. Learn what to look for on product labels here: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) **#FDASkinFacts**
- Cosmetics marketed to treat dark spots may contain mercury. Mercury is a harmful toxin that is absorbed through the skin and may build up in the body. Visit [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) to learn how to avoid these products. **#FDASkinFacts #SkinLightening**
- DYK? Mercury is a harmful toxin found in some skin creams. Learn more about harmful ingredients in skin lightening products from FDA Associate Commissioner for Minority Health, RDML Richardae Araojo: <https://youtu.be/bTI60JKxUSc>. **#FDASkinFacts #SkinLightening**
- The FDA requires imported skin products to have labels listing their ingredients in English. Always check labels for potentially harmful ingredients like hydroquinone or mercury before buying. And get the skin facts at: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts). **#FDASkinFacts #SkinLightening**
- What goes on your skin, goes in your body! Just like food labels, you should check the labels of skin products for harmful ingredients. Get the skin facts at: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts). **#FDASkinFacts**
- If you experience a bad reaction when using a skin product, please report that information to the FDA using [MedWatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch). Learn more: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) **#FDASkinFacts #SkinLightening**
- Do you know someone who uses skin lightening products? Share our resources on the potential health risks of products with certain ingredients that are sold online or in stores. [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) **#FDASkinFacts**
- A skin product containing hydroquinone can only be obtained through a prescription from a health care provider. Learn more: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) **#FDASkinFacts**

### DID YOU KNOW?

It is best to check the labels of skin products for ingredients that may pose a health risk. Avoid products with handmade labels, labels in languages other than English, or no label at all. Products like these are in violation of FDA regulations and may be harmful.

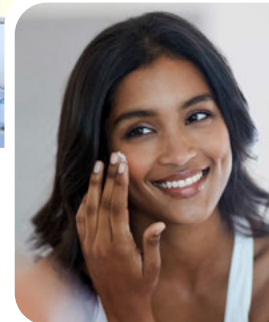


## Sample Social Media Messages: Twitter

- Whether they are called skin bleaching creams or skin “lighteners,” “brighteners,” or “eveners,” they all have the potential to contain harmful ingredients. Get the skin facts at: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts). **#FDASkinFacts**
- Help @FDAHealthEquity spread the word about harmful ingredients in some skin products. FDA Associate Commissioner for Minority Health RDML Richardae Araojo presents **#FDASkinFacts**: <https://youtu.be/bTl60JKxUSc> **#SkinLightening**
- DYK? There are no legally marketed over-the-counter skin products containing hydroquinone. Learn about potential hydroquinone health risks at: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts). **#FDASkinFacts #SkinLightening**
- The FDA has identified the harmful toxin mercury in some skin products. Visit [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) to learn how you can avoid health risks from mercury exposure. **#FDASkinFacts**
- Skin products may contain mercury and can cause mercury poisoning. Visit [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) to learn more about mercury poisoning and how to avoid dangerous products. **#FDASkinFacts**
- Learn about the @FDAHealthEquity Skin Facts! Initiative to help educate consumers about the potential health risks of hydroquinone and mercury in skin products: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts). **#FDASkinFacts**
- Skin products marketed to correct uneven skin tone may contain harmful ingredients. Checking product labels is one way to stay safe. Learn how at [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts). **#FDASkinFacts**
- Do you use skin products for “evening” your skin tone? Some of these products may contain ingredients that could harm your health. Learn more: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) **#FDASkinFacts #SkinLightening**
- DYK? Some online websites sell skin products that are not FDA-approved for sale in the US. Learn how to identify and avoid illegal skin lightening products: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts). **#FDASkinFacts**
- We can’t assume that skin lightening products sold in stores or online are safe. Products may contain potentially harmful ingredients like hydroquinone or mercury. Be sure to check the labels! Learn more: [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts) **#FDASkinFacts**

### DID YOU KNOW?

Hydroquinone and mercury are two ingredients sometimes found in skin lightening products sold in the form of creams, lotions, soaps, or powders. When you use these ingredients on your skin, they are absorbed into your body, which may be harmful.



Get the Skin Facts! by visiting [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts).

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## Digital Resources – A

GET THE **SkinFacts**



Only skin products **prescribed by a health care provider** can contain **HYDROQUINONE**.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
#FDAskinFacts #SkinLightening

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**DYK?** **HYDROQUINONE** is an active ingredient found in some skin products and **may cause discoloration of the skin** (ochronosis).

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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The FDA has received reports of **serious side effects** including skin rashes, facial swelling, and skin discoloration from the use of illegal skin products containing **HYDROQUINONE**.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
#FDAskinFacts #SkinLightening

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The sale of **over-the-counter** skin products containing **HYDROQUINONE** is **NOT APPROVED** by the FDA.

Consult with a health care provider for a prescription medication with hydroquinone.

[www.fda.gov/skinfacts](http://www.fda.gov/skinfacts)  
#SkinFacts #SkinLightening

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**DYK?** Skin lightening products with **HYDROQUINONE** are **NOT FDA-approved** for **over-the-counter sale** in the U.S.

Drug Facts	
<b>Active ingredients</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Hydroquinone (2.0%)	Skin Bleaching Agent
<b>Uses</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lightens dark discolorations in the skin such as freckles, age and liver spots.</li> <li>Even out skin tone and reduce skin discoloration.</li> </ul>	
<b>Warnings</b>	

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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Skin products that contain mercury may be harmful.

Call your health care provider or **Poison Control** at **1-800-222-1222** if you have been exposed to a skin product with **MERCURY**.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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## Digital Resources – B

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Using a skin product containing **mercury** may pose a **hazard to all** members of your household.

Mercury is a harmful toxin that releases vapors into the air and can be spread on surfaces like towels and doorknobs.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
#FDAskinFacts #SkinLightening

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Some skin “evening” products may contain **toxic mercury**.

Be sure to **avoid** products with these terms on the label:

- mercury
- mercuric
- mercurous chloride
- mercurio
- calomel
- Hg

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
#FDAskinFacts #SkinLightening

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**DYK?** Skin lightening products illegally sold in the U.S. may contain **potentially harmful ingredients** such as **hydroquinone**.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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**DYK?** The use of **mercury** in **SKIN LIGHTENING** products is **banned** by the FDA.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
#FDAskinFacts #SkinLightening

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Do you check labels **before** purchasing skin products?

You may be at risk of **serious side effects** from the use of skin lightening products containing **mercury** or **hydroquinone**. Be sure to check the label before purchasing to avoid these ingredients.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
#FDAskinFacts #SkinLightening

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Do you check labels **before** purchasing skin products?

You may be at risk of **serious side effects** from the use of skin lightening products containing **mercury** or **hydroquinone**. Be sure to check the label before purchasing to avoid these ingredients.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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## Digital Resources – C

GET THE SkinFacts

**Be wary of skin "evening" products advertised on social media.**

These products may contain harmful ingredients like **HYDROQUINONE** or **MERCURY**.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
#FDAskinFacts #SkinLightening

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**Be wary of skin "evening" products advertised online.**

These products may contain harmful ingredients like **HYDROQUINONE** or **MERCURY**.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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**DYK?**

Because of health risks, many countries including the U.S. have **banned the sale of skin products containing MERCURY.**

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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Do you know where your **skin lightening product** came from?

**Avoid products with:**

- no labels
- handmade labels
- labels in languages other than English

They might be illegally marketed in the U.S.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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**Do you use skin products marketed to:**

- Lighten skin?
- Correct uneven skin tone?
- Remove age spots, freckles, blemishes, acne, or wrinkles?

These products may be **SKIN LIGHTENERS** that contain ingredients that may be harmful to your health.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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**Skin lighteners** are often sold illegally across the nation, in stores for **Hispanic, Asian, African, or Middle Eastern** communities.

[www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)  
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# Digital Resources – D

**GET THE SkinFacts**

**DYK?** Skin lightening products are often marketed to racial and ethnic minority groups. Some of these products contain potentially harmful ingredients.

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**SKIN PRODUCT SAFETY: IDENTIFYING UNSAFE PRODUCTS**

U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS

**BEWARE**  
The FDA has received reports of **serious side effects** from the use of cosmetic and over-the-counter (over-the-counter) skin products containing hydroquinone or mercury. The sale of these products is illegal in the U.S. Read skin product labels to identify ingredients before purchasing.

**IDENTIFY**  
Skin lightening products may be identified with descriptions like:

- 1 Skin brightening soap
- 2 Skin evening lotion
- 3 Skin whitening powder
- 4 Spot correcting cream
- 5 Chemical peel

**CHECK**  
Before purchasing or using a skin lightening product, check the label to see if it contains hydroquinone or mercury.

**Mercury may also be listed as:**

- Mercurous chloride
- Calomel
- Mercuric
- Mercurio
- Hg

**To treat skin conditions such as:**

- Acne
- Psoriasis
- Vitiligo

**Be sure to avoid products with no labels, handmade labels, or labels not written in English.**

Get the Skin Facts! by visiting [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)

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**SKIN PRODUCT SAFETY: HYDROQUINONE**

U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS

SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS CONTAINING THE INGREDIENT HYDROQUINONE MAY CAUSE HARM.

**Did You Know?** Skin lightening products with **hydroquinone** are **NOT FDA-approved** for over-the-counter sale in the U.S.

**Hydroquinone** is an active ingredient in skin lightening products used to:

- Correct uneven skin tone
- Remove dark spots, blemishes, and wrinkles

**Serious side effects** from the use of these products have been reported:

- Skin discoloration (ochronosis) that may be permanent
- Rashes
- Facial swelling

**STAY SAFE!**  
Only use skin products containing hydroquinone when prescribed by a **licensed health care provider**.

Before purchasing or using over-the-counter skin products, check the product label for hydroquinone.

Get the Skin Facts! by visiting [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)

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**SKIN PRODUCT SAFETY: MERCURY**

U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS

SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS CONTAINING THE INGREDIENT MERCURY MAY CAUSE HARM.

**Did You Know?** The FDA has **banned** the use of **mercury** in skin lightening products.

Using a skin product with **mercury** may cause **serious health problems**, such as:

- Damage to the eyes, lungs, and kidneys
- Damage to the digestive, immune, and nervous systems
- Skin rashes and infections
- Brown-gray skin discoloration

**Check product ingredient labels** for terms identifying mercury:

- Mercurous chloride
- Calomel
- Mercuric
- Mercurio
- Hg

**Mercury poisoning can also result in coma and even death.**

**DO NOT USE or PURCHASE** products with these ingredients.

**If you or anyone in your family has been exposed to mercury:**

- 1 Call Poison Control at 1-800-235-1033 and contact your health care provider **immediately**.
- 2 Thoroughly wash your hands and other parts of your body that have been in contact with mercury.
- 3 Dispose of skin products with mercury at your local hazardous waste center.

Get the Skin Facts! by visiting [www.fda.gov/SkinFacts](http://www.fda.gov/SkinFacts)

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