

# Some cosmetics designed to promote eyelash growth are not without risks



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Some cosmetics, whose intended effect is to promote eyelash growth, contain prostaglandins. These compounds expose consumers to the risk of side effects such as irreversible darkening of the iris and melting of periorbital fat. Pending the results of an assessment by the European Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety, ANSES has warned the public of these potential adverse effects.

## CHANGE IN IRIS COLOUR AND MELTING OF THE FAT AROUND THE EYE SOCKET

In February 2025, ANSES received a report of an adverse effect that had occurred in a young woman following use of an eyelash serum. The patient had noticed a change in the colour of her left eye, which had become noticeably darker than the right, and also observed a loss of fat around both eye sockets, accentuating her dark circles. The symptoms had appeared gradually after five months of using the product, which she applied once a day to the base of her upper eyelashes (like an eyeliner), systematically starting with her left eye.

The assessment found that causality (i.e. the probability of a causal link between the use of the product and the observed effect) was likely, according to the criteria of the method used in cosmetovigilance:

- the chronology, i.e. the time between the use of the product and the onset of symptoms, was compatible,
- the ocular and periocular symptoms following application of the serum to the base of the eyelashes were suggestive of a link,
- no other cause was identified, no further tests were carried out and the patient permanently stopped using the product.

Investigation of this report showed that the serum used by the patient contained, among other things, isopropyl cloprostenate. This prostaglandin derivative may have caused the adverse effects observed.

## KNOWN ADVERSE EFFECTS IN OPHTHALMOLOGY

Prostaglandin and its derivatives are growth hormones used in certain eye drops, in ophthalmology, in the treatment of glaucoma<sup>1</sup>. Their adverse effects include eyelash growth and thickening, and permanent darkening of the iris, as well as chronic eye irritation, itching and loss of fat around the eye, affecting almost 10% of patients treated with these anti-glaucoma eye drops. However, with a treatment that is essential for effects are stated on the package leaflets for these medicines, and patients are usually informed of them when they are first prescribed.

<sup>1</sup> Glaucoma is a disease in which the pressure inside the eye increases, threatening eyesight if left untreated.

## ARE THESE RISKS ACCEPTABLE FOR A COSMETIC PRODUCT?

Prostaglandin derivatives used in cosmetics to promote eyelash growth expose the user to all the effects of prostaglandins detailed above. These effects are not usually mentioned on the packaging and users are therefore not informed of this possible risk.

In the United States, if prostaglandins are used in an eyelash growth cosmetic, the product is classified as a medicine, since its purpose is to modify a part of the body. It must therefore be approved as such by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the competent authority for cosmetics safety.

In Sweden, in 2013, the health authorities published a press release giving the results of analyses carried out on eyelash serums and eyelash growth products. They reported that "prostaglandin analogues were found in as many as nine of the 26 products in total. In three of the products prostaglandin analogues were not declared on the packaging. Prostaglandin analogues are added to stimulate eyelash and eyebrow growth." As a result, the Swedish Medical Products Agency advised consumers "not to use products containing prostaglandin analogues, as this may lead to serious side effects"<sup>2</sup>.

In 2018, the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) informed the European Commission that prostaglandin derivatives used in eyelash growth products posed a health risk, even at the concentrations applied in cosmetics.

Subsequently, in early 2022, the European Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS) concluded that the use of prostaglandin analogues in cosmetic products could present a risk to consumer health. In June 2025, having assessed all the evidence provided by the marketing authorisation applicants to support the safe use of the three prostaglandin analogues (isopropyl cloprostenate, norbimatoprost and dechloro dihydroxy difluoro ethylcloprostenolamide) for use in cosmetic products intended for promoting the growth of eyelashes and eyebrows, the SCCS published a preliminary opinion stating that "none of them can be considered safe"<sup>3</sup>. As required by the European Cosmetics Regulation, this preliminary opinion was submitted for public consultation until the end of August 2025. ANSES sent the SCCS information on the case mentioned at the beginning of this article. The European Union's conclusions are pending.

## ANSES ISSUES AN ALERT WITHOUT WAITING FOR POSSIBLE CHANGES TO THE REGULATIONS

Depending on the SCCS's final conclusions, regulatory measures may be decided upon by the European Commission that could lead to a ban or restriction on these substances in cosmetic products. Without waiting for these conclusions, ANSES nevertheless warned consumers of the possible adverse effects of these substances, some of which – such as the changes to iris colour – are irreversible.

If you notice an adverse effect following the use of a cosmetic product, it is important to declare it on the Ministry of Health's adverse health event reporting portal. Your report may help identify a new risk and enable the necessary measures to be taken<sup>4</sup>.



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<sup>2</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67472647886c31e352d8d0b4/prostaglandin-analogues-in-cosmetics.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://health.ec.europa.eu/publications/sccs-prostaglandin-analogues-methylamido-dihydro-noralfaprostal-mdn-isopropyl-cloprostenate-ipcpc\\_en](https://health.ec.europa.eu/publications/sccs-prostaglandin-analogues-methylamido-dihydro-noralfaprostal-mdn-isopropyl-cloprostenate-ipcpc_en)

<sup>4</sup> <https://signalement.social-sante.gouv.fr/>