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# Dermatoses caused by cultural practices



## Cosmetic cultural practices

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### Learning objectives

After completing this learning activity, participants should be able to discuss cultural competency and its value in an office- or hospital-based setting; identify common dermatologic diseases that can be attributed to religious practices; and identify common dermatologic diseases that can be attributed to environmentally driven cultural practices.

### Disclosures

#### Editors

The editors involved with this CME activity and all content validation/peer reviewers of the journal-based CME activity have reported no relevant financial relationships with commercial interest(s).

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The second article in this continuing medical education series discusses cosmetic practices associated with cultural dermatoses, including hair care, traditional clothing, and skin decorations. Often, the steps individuals take to enhance their physical appearance are determined by cultural perceptions of beauty. Without awareness of cultural practices, a multitude of cutaneous dermatoses may be missed by the dermatologist. Recognition and understanding of patients' cultural backgrounds and habits will allow the practicing dermatologist to offer better counseling and treatment options while providing a more meaningful and understanding physician–patient relationship. (*J Am Acad Dermatol* 2018;79:19-30.)

**Key words:** cosmetic; cultural competency; globalization.

## HENNA

### Key points

- **Henna is a red dye used for temporarily tattooing the skin and coloring hair, while black henna, an adulterated form, contains para-phenylenediamine, which is a strong skin sensitizer**
- **The most common complication of henna is allergic contact dermatitis; however, severe cutaneous and systemic adverse events have been reported**

### Abbreviations used:

ACD: allergic contact dermatitis  
CAM: complementary or alternative medicine  
PPD: para-phenylenediamine

### Background

Henna is a dye made from the plant *Lawsonia inermis* and is used for temporarily tattooing the skin, hair, and nails, an art form that is traditionally

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performed in Hindu and Muslim communities. It is applied for various social events, particularly weddings and Eid celebrations. Natural henna gives the skin a reddish hue from the active ingredient, lawsone, and additives like indigo darken the mixture. Unfortunately, although touted as henna, mixtures known as black henna, which contain many other darkening agents and possibly no natural henna at all, are frequently used.<sup>1</sup> Black henna often contains diaminobenzenes and diaminotoluenes, such as para-phenylenediamine (PPD) and p-toluenediamine.<sup>1</sup> PPD, in concentrations ranging from 0.25% to 64%, is used as an additive because it darkens the product and reduces the drying time from hours to minutes.<sup>1-3</sup> Other ingredients that have been found in henna mixtures include heavy metals. Nickel has been found in concentrations ranging from <2.5 ppm to 3.96 ppm and cobalt from concentrations of 2.96 ppm to 3.54 ppm.<sup>2</sup> Although no international standards exist, it has been recommended that products used on the skin should not contain nickel or cobalt at levels >5 ppm; however, a nickel concentration of 0.5 ppm has been sufficient to cause contact dermatitis.<sup>4,5</sup> Coffee, black tea, lemon juice, eucalyptus, clove, mustard oil, vinegar, indigo powder, and even animal urine can be included to alter henna color; fenugreek seeds, okra, and tamarind paste can be included to alter the texture.<sup>6-8</sup>

### Complications

Although rare, natural henna can lead to severe contact allergies.<sup>7,9-12</sup> Complications, particularly allergic contact dermatitis (ACD), most commonly arise when black henna containing PPD is used (Fig 1). Previous sensitization can occur from exposure to different hair dye preparations and by inhaling henna particles.<sup>13</sup> The incidence of allergic reaction among those receiving temporary tattoos can be as high as 2.3%.<sup>14</sup> Permanent sequelae from such reactions includes dyspigmentation, leukoderma, and keloids.<sup>15,16</sup>

Henna application has also been associated with contact urticaria, irritant contact dermatitis, erythema multiforme–like reaction, temporary hypertrichosis, superficial epidermal necrosis, and systemic allergic reactions, such as angioedema.<sup>6,10,14-24</sup> Serious, sometimes fatal, hemolytic crises in patients with underlying glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase deficiency have been reported in 4 children.<sup>25</sup> Because of its structural similarity to 1,4-naphthoquinone, it is believed that lawsone may act as an oxidant that can prove fatal in glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase–deficient persons.<sup>25</sup> Rare cases of acute renal failure and death caused by renal tubular necrosis have been reported.<sup>9</sup>



**Fig 1.** Bullous contact dermatitis on the dorsal surface of the right hand after application of black henna.

Hairdressers and artists are at risk for hand and forearm dermatitis; Khanna et al<sup>26</sup> found that 3.2% of Indian hairdressers and beauticians had positive patch tests to henna mixtures.

Patients suffering allergic reactions to henna should be advised to avoid further contact with henna products and PPD or its cross-reactors, such as latex, rubber, azo dyes, sulfonamides, sulfa drugs, thiazide diuretics, and local anesthetics.<sup>21,27,28</sup> Side effects can be reported to the US Food and Drug Administration hotline for tracking PPD-related reactions.<sup>29</sup>

### THREADING

#### Key points

- **Threading is a temporary hair removal technique that uses cotton thread and swift twisting movements**
- **Complications vary from minor pain and erythema to infections and koebnerization**

#### Background

Threading is a temporary hair removal technique that is commonly used in South Asia and the Middle East that has grown in popularity globally. Men most commonly remove hair from the cheek, ear, and forehead, while unwanted facial hair along the eyebrows, upper lip, chin, and cheeks are the most common locations for women (Fig 2).<sup>30,31</sup> Hairs are trapped between cotton threads that are held tightly

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