

Playing With Health

Synthetic Dyes And Possible Harmful Implications

■ **Purple contains chromium iodide** | Skin rashes, nausea, cough, and asthma; it is a causative agent of lung cancer

■ **Silver contains aluminium bromide** | Skin & eye irritation; respiratory problem

■ **Red contains mercury sulphite** | Skin allergy, Minamata disease that leads to mental retardation, paralysis and impairment of vision; it is a carcinogen

■ **Gulal is a mixture of mercury sulphite and powdered glass** | Minute skin abrasions

■ **Black contains lead oxide** | Affects kidney as well as the central nervous system; lead poisoning can have a disastrous impact on children

(Source: Cosmetic surgeon Dr Mohan Thomas)

Sanjay Hadkar



Special sale at Mantralaya

■ In an attempt to ensure safer Holi celebrations, the department of environment and social forestry has organized a sale of natural colours for the festival at Mantralaya on Saturday. "The department will also make arrangements to distribute natural colours in the slums. Eco clubs across the state have made natural colours and are distributing them through NGOs," said state environment secretary Valsa Nair Singh.

■ Mumbai APMC director Kirti Rana assured that overall, safe, branded colours are sold in city markets. However, he expressed apprehensions over the colours sold by roadside vendors and hawkers.



Do-It-Yourself Manual

■ Soak, crush and boil flowers of palash and marigold to get a pinkish red colour

■ Boil beetroot and carrot for dark red and orange, respectively

■ Mix turmeric power with gram flour for yellow

■ Boil amla and black grapes for purple

■ Boil spinach, coriander and mint leaves for green

■ Boil mehendi leaves and tea for dark brown



As The Festival Of Colour And Abandon Nears, Experts Red Flag The Use Of Cheap, Toxic Pigments

HOLI SPLASH

THE NATURAL WAY

Sanjay Hadkar

Chittaranjan Tembhekar | TNN

If you intend to buy Holi colours from a roadside vendor or a hawker, be warned. Cheap, locally-made, shiny colours can harm your health. Instead, go for costlier and branded natural colours or, if possible, try and make them at home. This is the common message to Mumbaikars from the offices of the state's environment ministry, the municipality and the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA).

Highlighting that some of the colours are made from sub-standard and 'expired' materials at makeshift workshops in Dharavi and Kurla, BMC officials said they have started examining vendors and hawkers' vending licences and colour brands. "Some non-branded colours are imported from outside the city. We are trying to figure out where these are made and packed," said a BMC source, indicating stringent action against those selling adulterated colours.

FDA joint commissioner C R Uttarwar made an appeal to those celebrating Holi to cautiously choose their colours in the market or, even better, make them at home by adopt-



ing age-old methods (See box: 'Do-It-Yourself Manual'). "Buying colours with silver or golden paints, asphalt and other synthetic dyes will surely harm the body."

Dr Ajit Saraf of the Maharashtra

Pollution Control Board (MPCB) said most Holi colours in the market are oxidized metals or industrial dyes mixed with engine oil.

"Colours in the form of paste have toxic compounds mixed in a base of

engine oil or other inferior quality oil and are thus capable of causing skin allergy and temporary blindness," said a senior environmental expert who works closely with the state government.

Organic festivities pep up Mumbaikars, expats

Bella Jaisinghani | TNN

Mumbai: This week, two prominent malls began handing out ten-rupee sachets of organic colour to visitors in the run-up to Sunday's Holi celebration. In a welcome drift, cheap and abundant natural colours have reinvented the springtime festival not just for individuals and housing societies but also expatriate groups and corporates who run miles from colour soaked in heavy metal.

Rising bottomlines tell the story. "Certified manufacturer" Kuldeep Jajoo has his hands full with Holi orders from the A-list of 30 companies on the BSE Sensex. "The availability of cheap non-toxic colours has turned Holi into a bridge-building exercise in the manner of Diwali and Christmas. Leading corporate groups, cement companies, IT majors and banks are gifting or-



Anil Shinde

ganic colour to staffers and clients. It helps that celebration packs cost as little as Rs 75-100, making this perhaps India's cheapest festival," says Jajoo.

Office parties have begun to draft safe, environment-friendly colours into

their celebrations, now that organic colours can be prepared to look bright and shiny like the synthetic variety. In a brilliant use of technique, some can be washed away leaving no stains.

A group of Germans in Bandra and a cluster of Americans from Powai have devised their own genteel Holi parties on Sunday. "Foreigners love Holi but are wary of playing with chemical colours. Particularly in this case, the Germans have small children," says Vishruti Dev who is supplying organic colours to both parties.

Dev is a garment exporter who prepares herbal colours for dyeing fabric in the course of work. This time of the year, however, she dries the material for use as Holi powder. "We sold 2,000 packets last year, and this season, the demand for 5,000 packets has outstripped our expectations," she says. Localized Holi Milan parties are

making the switch as well. The progressive members of Kandivli's Agrawal Residency have placed an order for pure, unadulterated gulal. "Oil paint and chemical colours are out of the question as they deter most, particularly elders and young children. We will have a rairdance and DJ celebration before settling to a community meal of *aamras puri*," says organizer Pankaj Kotecha.



First-aid for the revellers

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Holi is not only time for colours, it's also time for medical emergencies. Doctors say it is quite common to come across patients with a skin rash or a bout of hay fever caused due to harmful chemicals used in synthetic colours. Rare instances of chemical burns and even corneal abrasions are also reported.

Firstly, the commonly used "colours" during Holi derive their hue from chemicals. Said eye surgeon Dr S Natrajan, "We have seen cases of allergic conjunctivitis, chemical burns, corneal abrasion, blunt trauma to the eye during Holi." (See box: 'Playing With Health'). He adds that mild redness and irritation can subside with frequent washing. "However if there is intense pain and burning, or if the vision is affected, consult an eye doctor."

While herbal alternatives are easily available in the market, there are not many takers for these options as they don't leave a deep colour. Many revellers hence choose to use synthetic colours. Skin specialists advise people to apply oil to reduce the impact of chemicals. Said Dr S Dube, who runs a spa in north-eastern suburbs, "For deep stains, people can use a cotton ball soaked in acetone. Use of moisturizer or cold creams is good."

Cosmetic surgeon Mohan Thomas said that an application of foundation before playing Holi would protect the skin and oil to prevent hair loss. "Alternatively, they could soak fenugreek seeds in four tablespoons of curd and then apply to hair. Then wash away with shampoo."