

Rash decision? New UK coins increase nickel skin allergy risk fourfold

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In a bid to save £10 million a year the British Treasury is replacing copper–nickel five and ten pence coins with new nickel-plated steel versions. However, while no UK health assessment has taken place, scientists in Sweden have analyzed the allergy risk after the Swedish state bank announced it will reduce traces of nickel in Swedish coinage.

The assessment, published in *Contact Dermatitis* reveals that the UK public's exposure to nickel [allergic reactions](#) will increase four fold. The team analyzes skin exposure and metal release in artificial sweat to find that the amount of nickel deposited onto skin during the handling of nickel-plated coins over one hour was four times higher than that from copper-nickel coins.

The authors concluded that UK citizens are now unnecessarily exposed to higher levels of nickel on the skin.

"The old cupronickel versions, containing 75 per cent copper and 25 per cent nickel, are now being replaced by cheaper nickel-plated steel. No [risk assessment](#) was undertaken by the Royal Mint before release of the coins," said Dr Anneli Julander, Karolinska Institutet from Sweden.

"This is of public health concern and the fears raised by British [dermatologists](#) are now confirmed. Nickel in coins needs to be included in the EU restriction of nickel (REACH) to protect the citizen."

More information: Anneli Julander, Klara Midander, Gunilla Herting, Jacob P. Thyssen, Ian R. White, Inger Odnevall Wallinder, Carola Lidén,

New UK nickel-plated steel coins constitute an increased allergy and eczema risk, *Contact Dermatitis*, May 2013, Wiley, [DOI: 10.1111/cod.12092](https://doi.org/10.1111/cod.12092)

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