

# Revealed: The deadly superbugs lurking in more than nine in ten make-up bags

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The vast majority of in-use make-up products such as beauty blenders, mascara and lip gloss are contaminated with potentially life threatening superbugs, new research from Aston University published in the *Journal*

*of Applied Microbiology* has revealed.

Make-up products used every day by millions of people in the UK are contaminated with potentially deadly bugs, such as E.coli and Staphylococci, because most are not being cleaned and are used far beyond their expiry dates, new research led by Dr. Amreen Bashir and Professor Peter Lambert of Aston University's School of Life and Health Sciences has shown.

Bacteria that can cause illnesses ranging from skin infections to blood poisoning if used near eyes, mouth or cuts or grazes were found in nine out of ten of the products. This risk is amplified in immunocompromised people who are more likely to contract infections from opportunistic [bacteria](#).

The relatively new beauty blenders—sponges used to apply skin foundation products—were found to have the highest levels of potentially harmful bacteria—with the vast majority (93 per cent) not having ever been cleaned, despite more than two thirds (64 per cent) being dropped on the floor at some point during use.

The research is the first to look at beauty blender products—hugely popular make-up sponges used to blend foundation and contouring on the face. Often endorsed by celebrities, these sponges are estimated to have sold over 6.5million worldwide. The Aston researchers found these products are particularly susceptible to contamination as they are often left damp after use, which creates an ideal breeding ground for harmful bacteria.

Researchers say the findings reveal that consumers are unwittingly putting themselves at risk, and that manufacturers and [regulatory bodies](#) should do more to protect their customers by making expiry dates and cleaning requirements more prominent on packaging. EU guidance holds

make-up brands to strict hygiene standards of manufacture and states that E.coli in particular should not be found in any concentration in new cosmetic products. However, there is currently limited consumer protection around the risks of contaminating products while in use.

Post-Brexit, UK consumers could be at even greater risk as they will no longer be protected by EU regulations and could find themselves purchasing more beauty products from the US—for example—where there are no regulatory requirements to put expiry dates on make-up packaging at all.

Commenting on the new findings, Dr. Bashir said: "Consumers' poor hygiene practices when it comes to using make-up, especially beauty blenders, is very worrying when you consider that we found bacteria such as E.coli—which is linked with faecal contamination—breeding on the products we tested.

"More needs to be done to help educate consumers and the make-up industry as a whole about the need to wash beauty blenders regularly and dry them thoroughly, as well as the risks of using make-up beyond its expiry date."

**More information:** A. Bashir et al, Microbiological study of used cosmetic products: highlighting possible impact on consumer health, *Journal of Applied Microbiology* (2019). DOI: [10.1111/jam.14479](https://doi.org/10.1111/jam.14479)

Provided by Aston University

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