

# THE MISCONCEPTION AROUND BLACK NATURAL HENNA

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## Abstract

Although the risk of P-phenylenediamine (PPD) contained in henna is well-known and well-documented in the medical literature, other ways of using temporary tattoos in henna such as Jagua are little known.

**Keywords:** black henna, blisters, itch

Figure 1: Allergic reaction on the hands after 5 days. Dr Elghblawi ®



Figure 2 Allergic reaction post black henna and sunbed Dr Elghblawi ®



## Case report:

18-year-old Yemeni British, skin type IV, presented with an itchy red skin reaction on the inscription of the henna for the Eid feast. She described her hands as on fire. She said that she didn't have any reactions at all post henna by day 5 and then went for sunbed for 9 minutes, whereby 2 days later she developed intense itchy red skin reactions following the pattern of the henna, and some minute blisters followed later (Figures 1-3). She had, however, multiple henna art on her hands in the past without any known reactions whatsoever. The henna brand used is called Jagua henna, which is a fruit that grows in Amazon, and its juice gel is claimed to give the natural black dye colour. The main ingredients in Jagua henna are genipin and geniposide, which have emerged as an interesting option for stained henna. She is otherwise fit and well.

I made some searches online and found that Jagua claimed to have a quite high allergy and reaction rate and especially in those allergic to strawberries, kiwi fruit, and berries. However, in this case, she has no allergies to those claimed fruits.

Henna is an art that many Muslim women love to have for certain occasions, namely Eid and weddings. Certain women have this done at their home rather than at a licensed salon which is used and applied by specialists or professionals, who follow rules and won't apply these products unless they are FDA certified and meet the regulatory requirements for composition and purity, because any temporary tattoo products that don't comply with restrictions on colour and additives are considered adulterated and unlawful.

Her GP gave her an oral antibiotic (Floxacin capsules 500mg, numbing cream (Lidocaine 2%), painkillers (Cocodamol tablet), and an antihistamine tablet (Cetirizine 10mg).

In this case scenario, the lady allegedly using black natural henna which caused her no issues in the past; however, she also used sunbeds post-henna after 5 days. Natural henna does not have a natural black colour, but either a brownish, orange-brown or reddish-brown tint. The attained black colour is due to adding a coal tar hair PPD to stain black and last longer, which is well known in causing dangerous skin allergies and is unsafe for the skin. Having this said, it will increase the risk of later having a severe allergic reaction to hair dyes in the future. Therefore, it is advisable to have a patch test on a small area of the skin before having them just in case.

Figure 3 some minutes after blisters Dr Elghblawi ®



### Discussion and conclusion:

Contextual skin painting (pseudo-tattooing) with henna is traditionally performed mainly in Muslim or Hindu cultures(1).

Temporary tattoos made with an extract of the jagua fruit are becoming steadily popular, and is claimed to be 'dermatologically tested' and does not contain p-phenylenediamine.

While it is illegal to use PPD-containing hair dye in henna tattoos. The lady used a different henna, which claimed to be natural (Jagua henna). It's an extract of Amazonian jagua fruit which is used extensively by indigenous people of southeast Asia for dying bodies, hair, and clothing dye(2,3), and has been in traditional Chinese medicine, for epochs(4).

However, the reaction, in this case, might be attributed to perhaps multiple causations, including using the artificial heating lamps exposing the body to UV rays leading to those whitish/reddish puffy bumps, and itchy rashes in the patterns of the henna design, after using a tanning bed. Moreover, tanning can cause heat rash (miliaria) due to hindering the flow of sweat between the skin layers. Also, the cleaning wipes can be associated as well. The lady denied using any tanning lotions, oils, or other products prior to the sunbed session, which could clog pores and cause reactions.

There is however, an increase in the reported number of allergic reactions to 'black henna' temporary tattoos in the UK, according to the British Skin Foundation, in 2015.

It has been said that more than 80% of the reactions they had seen were in children under the age of 16.

The studies showed that the allergen identified is genipin, which could result in an increase in the number of allergic reactions in the future.

It's advisable to avoid direct sun rays while the rash recovers and to wear loose-fitting clothes. Also, it's advisable to give antihistamines to alleviate itching and topical steroids to counteract the inflammations. Also, sunbeds are known to cause skin cancer, so it's wise to avoid them. The lady's hands recovered well with some remanent darkish brown stains which will take time to fade out slowly (Figure 4). I advised keep using emollients to ease the exfoliations and flaking process.

Figure 4 notes the exfoliation with darkening. Dr Elghblawi ®



Consent was taken from the patient for educational purposes.

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