

MERCURY IN SKIN-LIGHTENING PRODUCTS (SLPs)



WHY PEOPLE USE SLPs

Cultural norms in many countries depict lighter skin being associated with beauty, wealth, privilege, and intelligence. This perpetuates colorism and harmful beauty standards for many people. Consumers are pushed to use SLPs from a variety of sources.

PREVALENCE OF SLPs

Skin lightening cosmetics are sold in stores, informal markets, and online platforms around the world.



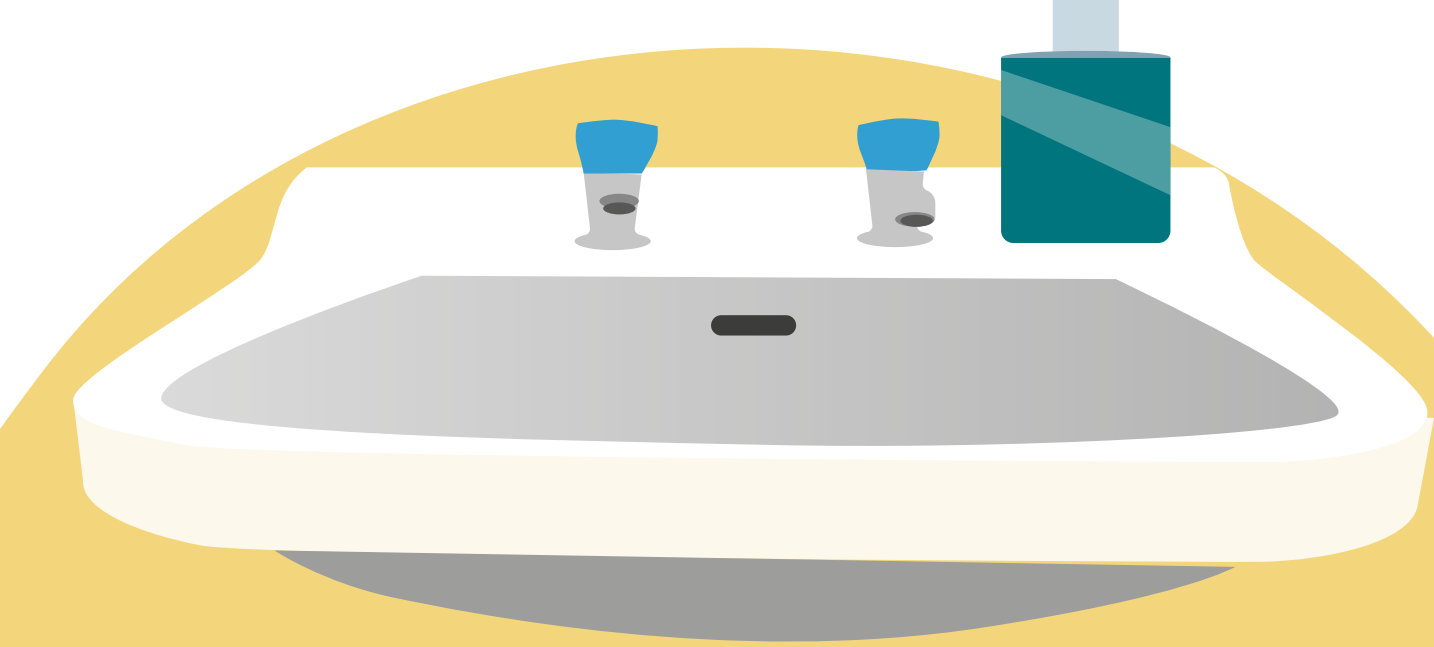
HEALTH IMPACTS

Dangerous ingredients in SLPs, such as mercury, can cause rashes, discoloration, scarring, and long-term damage to the nervous system, immune system, and kidneys. Pregnant women, fetuses, and small children are especially vulnerable to these effects.



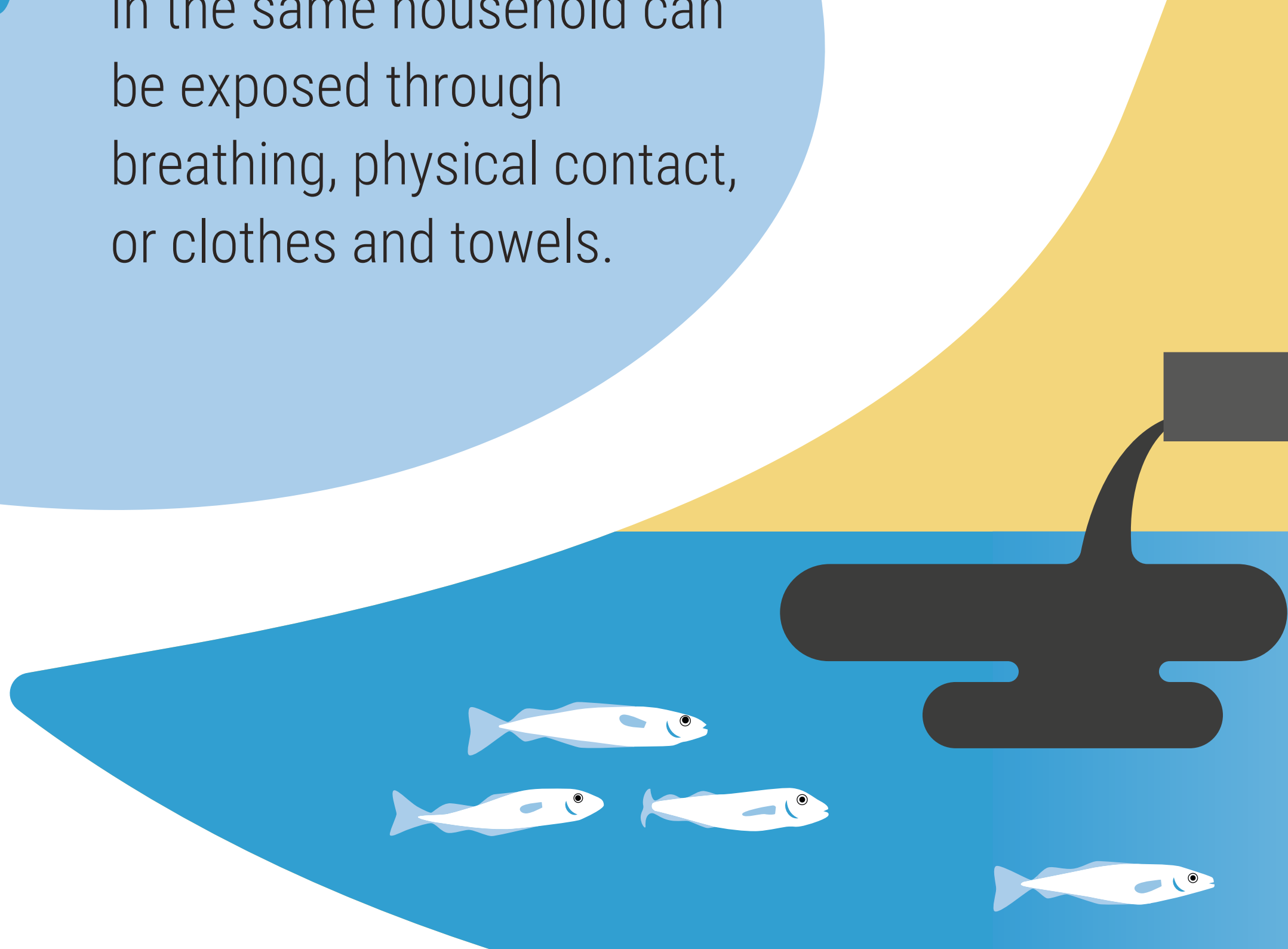
EXPOSURE

Risks from SLPs extend beyond the users. Those in the same household can be exposed through breathing, physical contact, or clothes and towels.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Skin-lightening products can impact water quality when they are washed down drains and discharged into wastewater. Fish and other organisms may also be exposed, impacting their health and contaminating food supplies.



MAIN ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

Build national and regional capacity to enforce legislation targeting the manufacture, import, export, and sale of mercury-containing skin-lightening products, including in informal and online markets. Establish clear penalties and accountability measures for non-compliance.

SUPPLY CHAIN CONTROLS

Improve identification and testing of mercury-added products across physical and online sales channels. Map manufacturing and trade patterns, conduct behavioral studies on product usage and disposal, and implement proper waste management systems.

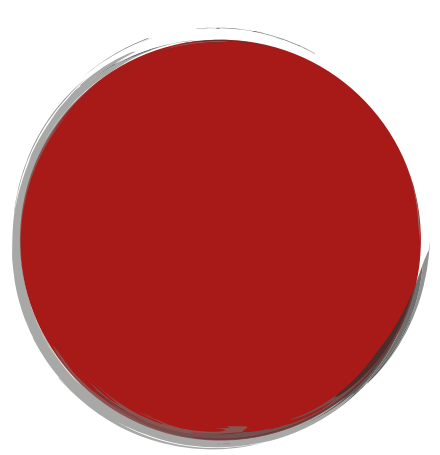
ENFORCEMENT AND CONSUMER SAFETY

Implement surveillance systems, detention lists, and biomonitoring programs. Reform liability frameworks for online platforms, promote voluntary safety pledges, and ensure strong monitoring mechanisms to control illegal trade and protect consumer health.

AWARENESS RAISING

Launch national and global awareness and public health campaigns with strong gender mainstreaming. Engage key stakeholders including the cosmetic industry, youth groups, influencers, and vulnerable populations to shift consumer behavior and policy support.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury is a global treaty that helps countries control, reduce and eliminate mercury with the objective to protect human health and the environment. The UNEP Global Mercury Partnership supports effective implementation of the Minamata Convention, fostering collaboration, providing state of the art knowledge and science, and raising awareness to inspire global action towards a mercury-free future.



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