



Kohl, Surmah & Lead Concerns

May 26th, 2007 in [Thoughts](#) by yursil | [10 comments](#) | | [Toggle Highlighting](#)

When it comes to aspects of the sunnah such as kohl, it is important to be very careful when dealing with alarmist messages regarding it. Recently there have been concerns of the FDA banning kohl due to lead, the Canadian health organization doing the same, and a regurgitation of a 1991 report out about lead within kohl.

The report is available here:

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=1954922&dopt=Abstract

The Canadian health message is available here:

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/2005/2005_103_e.html

It states:

Health Canada is advising Canadians that some varieties of traditional kohl products have been found to contain lead. Kohl (also known as: kajal, surma, al-kahl/al-kohl) is a traditional eye cosmetic of Middle Eastern, Asian and North African societies that is also at times used medicinally as a natural health product. Several children in Canada exposed to kohl containing lead have been identified with elevated levels of lead in their blood, putting them at risk of serious health problems.

What is Kohl?

Kohl is a blend of minerals, soot from herbs and seeds. Often in hadith literature it is translated as antimony.

Treat your eyes with kohl, for it nourishes eyes and eyelashes. (Abu Dawud, Tib, 14; Tirmidhi, Tib, 9.)

Sunan Abi Dawood (3837) Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) related the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The best of your kohl is ithmid (antimony), for it makes the vision clear and makes the hair grow."

As is related by Yazeed al-Farsee in Shamaa'ilut-Tirmidhee, "Chapter of Seeing the Prophet (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) in a Dream,' who said, 'Indeed, I saw the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) in a dream.' So he said, 'Verily, the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) used to say, "Indeed, the Shaytaan cannot imitate me, so whoever has seen me in a dream has indeed seen me." Can you describe the person you have seen in the dream?' I said. 'Yes. I will describe him between the spectrum of two men. His body and flesh were moderate, complexion was brown-skinned, inclining towards whiteness, eyes were kohl-smeared, smile was pleasant, figure was beautiful and round-like...."

I am a fairly regular user of kohl and as such the issue of lead was a concerning one, and I looked into it. As

a disclaimer I am no expert in the health field, but I did perform some research.

This is what I found:

1) Lead is not absorbed through the skin:

<http://www.aiha.org/Content/AccessInfo/consumer/IsLeadaProbleminMyHome.htm>

American Industrial Hygiene Association

How does lead get into our bodies?

A certain amount of lead is always in our bodies as a result of the “background” presence of lead in food, water, and naturally-occurring sources in the soil. This small amount of lead does not cause harm in either children or adults. In order for lead to cause lead poisoning, it must get into our bodies above background levels. Lead can enter the body in the following ways:

If we or our children eat even small chips of lead-based paints or lead-contaminated soil or dust (either directly or from unwashed food or hands).

If we drink water, tea, or other beverages contaminated with lead.

If we or our children breathe dust particles, causing some of them to get caught in the nose and lungs. If those particles contain lead, the lead can be taken into the blood stream.

It is important for you to know that lead does not enter the body through the skin. The skin forms a natural barrier which can keep the lead out.

The same alarmist study which brought this issue to the forefront states:

Controlled studies by Healy and Aslam (11) have concluded that transcorneal transport does not occur. Lead absorption, in their opinion, is primarily alimentary. When applied to the conjunctival surfaces around the eyes, kohl is an irritant that produces a slight burning feeling and tearing. The subjects, especially children, often wipe their eyes and then fail to wash their hands afterwards. In children, finger sucking is very common, and this is the primary route of ingestion. Kohl is applied to the skin, it is not a product intended to be injected or otherwise introduced into the bloodstream.

2) Antimony (which is what some say is the kohl referenced by the Hadith) is highly toxic, more than lead. Antimony poisoning is akin to arsenic poisoning. Most people don't know about antimony poisoning, but we hear often about lead poisoning because it is the public consciousness and children are often found eating lead within paint chips.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antimony>

Antimony and many of its compounds are toxic. Clinically, antimony poisoning is very similar to arsenic poisoning. In small doses, antimony causes headache, dizziness, and depression. Larger doses cause violent and frequent vomiting, and will lead to death in a few days.

3) If we accept that Kohl and Surmah was primarily referencing antimony, what the Prophet (Sallallahu'alaiheewassalam) was recommending -was- most likely containing some levels of lead. Antimony

often found with lead, in the minerals such as [nagyagite](#).

4) A good amount of kohl in today's products is non-metallic in nature and is basically harmless soot from special herbs and seeds.

5) The amount of actual product used is absolutely miniscule. When we consider the amount of product actually used the percentages below start to seem much less significant:

Nine of the twenty-two samples tested contained less than 0.6% lead;

Seven samples had lead levels in excess of 50%.

The remainder ranged from 3.31 to 37.3%.

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I contacted the brand [Hashmi Aswad Products](#) to ask about this

The contact responded with:

This is in ref. to your email regarding the report about kohl / kajal and its safety, please note that kohl / kajal are for external use only.

Regarding the accusation made in the report are based on the total quantity in the container, which is an unscientific approach and just hypothetical, whereas scientific studies of any product are always carried out on the basis of per application / dose of a product. (quantity per application / dose).

In case of kohl, it is applied externally from approx 0.5 mg to max 1 mg. and in case of kajal, it is applied externally up to approx 16 µ grams (micro gram) in a such a small quantity it is not possible to produce any toxic effect.

It has been further proved through scientific studies that these products are safe for human use and cannot produce any toxic effect. copies of test studies are attached for your ready reference.

The studies are available here for your review:

[Cert stick 1.jpg](#)

[Cert stick 2.jpg](#)

[Cert stick 1.jpg](#)

[Cert tube 2.jpg](#)

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Basically this boils down to a few children probably ate something they should not, causing alarm throughout the health systems of various countries.

It is easy to blame traditional things rather than parents on accessibility and supervision. Many things should not be ingested by children, and can cause serious affects. Lead poisoning is a primary concern for development and learning in children, if you wish to be careful to avoid the finger sucking situation discussed in the article, ensure you are using a more cosmetic form of kohl for your children.

Keep your kohl in your medicine cabinet or a bag for personal items such as your razors, medicines, shampoo, etc. You wouldn't want your kids eating those things either.

What the Prophet (Sallallahu'alaiheewassalam) recommended should not be abandoned so quickly, especially due to modernized standards of health and precautionary safety by the state. Who knows what the many benefits are of kohl and what it protects us from?

<http://www.yursil.com/blog/?s=lead+concerns+in+surma>

