

November 15, 1946

Miss Virginia Pearson,
Librarian, Merchandise Testing and
Development Laboratory,
Sears, Roebuck and Company,
Chicago 7, Illinois.

Department 817

Dear Miss Pearson:

With reference to the use of lead acetate as a hair dye, (or the use of other metallic compounds for similar purposes), it should be said that there is a very considerable attitude of objection among public health authorities and representatives of the Food and Drug Administration, these feelings being based on two general points of view, which in my opinion are quite valid. First it is fair to say that the use of these materials for these purposes is unnecessary. Second the risk of their use is not confined to the possibility of their absorption through the scalp, although in general that is not entirely negligible, since abrasion of the scalp, which occurs with considerable frequency as the result of various diseases of the scalp, may contribute materially to the absorption of anything that is applied upon the hair and scalp. The additional risk is that of ingesting lead by virtue of the contamination of fingers, both at the time of applying these materials and also subsequently in running the hands through the hair, etc. Perhaps this hazard is not as serious as many people are inclined to believe. I personally doubt that it is very significant. On the other hand, some not too critical thought has related this type of exposure to that which is known to occur in China and Japan, particularly where lead poisoning among children has occurred rather frequently as the result of the use of lead-containing cosmetics by mothers of nurslings. I think you can understand the trend of thought that suggests this relationship. In any case, it is a little difficult to defend the use of cosmetics of this type.

As to the matter of the nose-ring for the bull, I think you need not have the slightest worry. There is no question about some slight absorption of lead under these conditions. However, the quantity is of purely theoretical significance. Actually we have found in a series of observations on persons in whose tissues lead shot and bullets are imbedded, that while absorption occurs it is usually of negligible proportions. No doubt you will be interested in a reprint which gives most of the information we have collected on this point. I also send you a copy of the paper which represents some of the cullings of unusual cases of lead poisoning in medical literature, as found by our former librarian, Miss Nell Conway.

Very truly yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.