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Could Jessica Alba's Honest Company Sunscreen Really "Not Work?"

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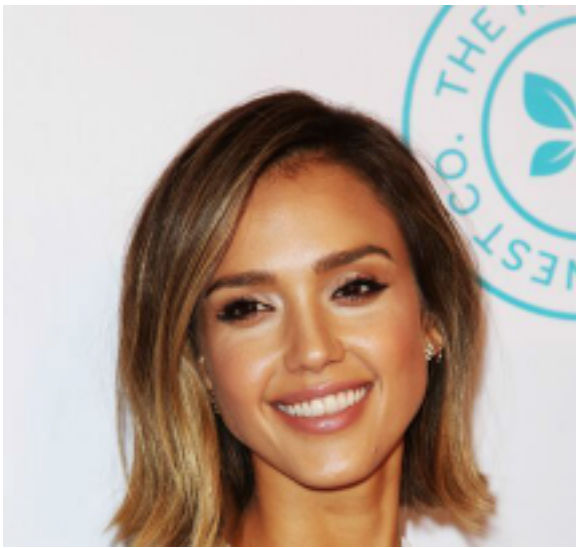
Jessica Alba's Honest Company sunscreen claims to include "everything you need, nothing you don't," but some customers aren't entirely convinced.

The eco-friendly, billion-dollar company is under fire after some customers claimed its (currently sold-out) sunscreen is ineffective. Unhappy users have taken to Amazon and Twitter to reveal the burns that they or their kids endured after using the formula.





While the brand's site has an overwhelming number of positive reviews for the sunscreen, its Amazon page has a slew of one-star ratings, accompanied by some pretty angry comments. When confronted about the issue, the Honest Company gave the following statement: The Honest Company is committed to providing safe and effective products, and we take all consumer feedback very seriously. Our Sunscreen Lotion was tested, by an independent 3rd party, against the protocols prescribed by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration's (FDA) monograph for over-the-counter sunscreen products. The results showed that our product is effective and safe for use as an 80 minute water-resistant (FDA's highest rating), SPF 30 sunscreen lotion in accordance with FDA regulations when used as directed (Shake Well. Apply liberally and evenly 15 minutes before sun exposure. Reapply after 80 minutes of swimming or sweating, immediately after towel drying and at least every 2 hours). The number of complaints received on our own website about our Sunscreen Lotion constitute less than one half of one percent of all units actually sold at honest.com. We stand behind the safety and efficacy of this product.



The company's co-founders — Alba as well as Christopher Gavin — also posted a statement addressing the backlash on their website Sunday: "Protecting our loved ones and yours is the reason we founded The Honest Company. As parents, it pains us to hear that anyone has had a negative experience with our sunscreen." They go on to reassure users that their product passed all testing requirements but that the concerns of their customers — along with their safety and satisfaction — are their top priority.

So, why are some people feeling the burn from this particular sunscreen? Forbes points

out that the sunscreen was recently reformulated — lowering the non-nano zinc oxide ingredient from 20% to 9.3% — which could be a factor. But, according to Debbie Palmer, DO, board-certified dermatologist and creator of Replere, that number still falls within the minimum recommended concentration of 5%. "The 10-20% concentration is ideal for UV protection but it is common to find brands with 2-7% concentrations," she says.

While some have criticized the product for having only one active ingredient, dermatologist and director of cosmetic and clinical research at Mt. Sinai Hospital Joshua Zeichner, MD is quick to defend it. "Zinc oxide is an extremely effective sun-blocking ingredient, effective against UVB and UVA rays," he says. He adds that companies who include it are required to pass a critical wavelength test, which ensures the product provides broad spectrum coverage. "The label can say 'broad spectrum' only if the product passes the test," he says. (Honest Company's does.)

Cosmetic chemist Ni'Kita Wilson chimed in, emphasizing that sunscreens don't just "not work." Since they're considered drugs by the FDA, "you can't just put whatever you want to in the bottle, slap a label on it, and sell it to consumers," she says. There are specific guidelines for which actives to use, how much can be used, and which can be used together, she says. There's also a human-testing phase that determines what SPF number can be given, as well as stability testing that proves the level of actives used to obtain that SPF number will remain unchanged for at least two years.

"With all of these requirements [in place] it is really hard to sell sunscreens that don't work," Wilson says. "Also, if a sunscreen was truly ineffective, then everyone using it would have the same results — there is no placebo effect with sunscreens."

While the product itself might be safe, consumer error could still very much be a problem. Because ingredients can settle and disperse in packaging (this is especially true of natural formulas), it's important (like, really, really important) to shake the tube well before using it. Otherwise, you might get a squirt of sunscreen that has a low concentration of zinc oxide in it — making for a nice lotion, but not a very nice sun protectant.

Dr. Palmer also stresses the importance of thoroughly applying one ounce, enough to fill a shot glass, and adjusting the amount depending on body size. You should rub the sunscreen on dry skin 15 minutes before going outdoors (not immediately before jumping into the pool) and keep applying it after 80 minutes of swimming, sweating, and towel drying — or at least every two hours.

"It must be applied thick enough to achieve the protection on the label and must be reapplied," says Dr. Zeichner. "Zinc oxide will clump on the surface of the skin over time, making its protection less effective."

Finally, some of the skin redness reported could be a result of sensitivity to the formula, not the sun. "Some [botanical ingredients] can cause allergic or irritant skin reactions," says Dr. Zeichner. "'Natural' does not always mean 'better' or 'more gentle on the skin.'"

Also, keep in mind that SPF 30 only blocks 97% of ultraviolet rays, so consider switching to a higher SPF or swapping out sunscreen formulas altogether. Remember that sunscreen is just one step in a long chain of sun protection. Wear loose-fitting long pants and sleeves, invest in a large-brim hat that covers your face and neck, and stay in the shade whenever possible.

Now go out there and enjoy the last days of summer while you still can — just remember to take the proper precautions.