

**Facts and resources: J&J's Asbestos-Contaminated Talc-Based Baby Powder
(For internal use only)**

Big News:

In Racial Justice Victory, Johnson & Johnson to Pay \$2B to Women in Asbestos-Laced Baby Powder Suit

https://www.democracynow.org/2020/6/26/johnson_johnson_talcum_products_asbestos

J&J Statement May 19, 2020

<https://www.jnj.com/our-company/johnson-johnson-consumer-health-announces-discontinuation-of-talc-based-johnsons-baby-powder-in-u-s-and-canada>

- Discontinuation only effective in the U.S. and Canada.
- Johnson's Baby Powder represents approximately 0.5% of the total U.S. Consumer Health business.
- Company will wind down the commercialization of talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder in the U.S. and Canada in the coming months.
- Existing inventory will continue to be sold through retailers until it runs out. Cornstarch-based Johnson's Baby Powder will remain available in North America.
- Both types of Johnson's Baby Powder – talc-based and cornstarch-based – will continue to be sold in other markets around the world

NYT coverage: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/business/johnson-baby-powder-sales-stopped.html>

Wall Street Journal October 2019: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/johnson-johnsons-legal-challenges-mount-11571055242>

- Johnson & Johnson is “facing lawsuits from more than 100,000 plaintiffs over its product safety and marketing tactics”
- Company has taken the aggressive strategy of battling many of the cases in court. “And it is losing. A lot.”
- “Juries and judges have ordered the health-products giant to pay billions of dollars in several recent trials over claims that J&J's signature baby powder and certain drugs and medical devices injured people, and that its marketing practices fueled the opioid-addiction epidemic.”
- 15,500 talc lawsuit plaintiffs as of June 2019.

This excellent [Vox interview with David Michaels](#) delves into the Johnson's Baby Powder problem among many other examples Michaels describes in his new book about the corporate manipulation of science.

General website w/useful info about talc including studies, cancer stats, timeline of J&J lawsuits. <https://truthabouttalc.com>

Talc Marketing to Women of Color

Reuters Special Report: As Baby Powder concerns mounted, J&J focused marketing on minority, overweight women, (4.9.19)

- In 2006, IARC classified cosmetic talc as “possibly carcinogenic” when women used it as a genital antiperspirant and deodorant, and J&J then “looked for ways to sell more Baby Powder to two key groups of longtime users: African-American and overweight women.”
- 2006 internal J&J marketing presentation: The “right place” to focus was “under developed geographical areas with hot weather, and higher AA [African American] population”
- “Powder is still considered a relevant product among AA consumers,” the presentation said. “This could be an opportunity.”
- According to internal company docs: J&J distributed Baby Powder samples through churches and beauty salons in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods
- Also ran digital and print promotions with weight-loss and wellness company Weight Watchers and launched a \$300,000 radio advertising campaign in a half-dozen markets aiming to reach “curvy Southern women 18-49 skewing African American.”
- Two years after IARC classification: J&J sought proposals for an “African American agency” to develop marketing campaigns for the company’s baby products line.
- A 2008 document sent to prospective agencies summed up the situation: “Johnson’s Baby Oil and Baby Powder products, while traditionally used only on babies, are today primarily consumed by adult AA women for use on themselves.” One way to reverse the brand’s decline, it said, was by “speaking to AA consumers with a more relevant message with the most effective media vehicles.”
- That year, the company contracted with a North Carolina marketing firm, Segmented Marketing Services Inc, which says it specializes in targeted promotions to “ethnic consumers.” The firm would distribute 100,000 gift bags containing Baby Powder and other Johnson’s baby products in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods in Chicago, according to a contract with J&J.

National Women’s Health Network press release on J&Js discontinuation:

<https://nwhn.org/statement-on-jjs-discontinuation-of-its-talc-based-baby-powder-in-u-s-and-canada/>

- “J&J’s decision will reduce unnecessary exposure to harmful chemicals to millions of people in North America, especially Black women and women of color who have been aggressively targeted by J&J. This is an important step in the right direction,” M. Isabelle Chaudry, NWHN’s Senior Policy Manager.
- But we call on the company to halt sales of its talc-based baby powder worldwide and to recall existing inventory here at home. J&J’s decision to keep marketing the product internationally echoes their earlier efforts to double down on marketing to Black and Latinx women and other vulnerable populations.

NWHN January 2020 press release after JAMA study concluded no “statistically significant” link between genital powder use and ovarian cancer

<https://www.nwhn.org/why-women-should-still-avoid-talc-based-powder/>

- A 2016 [study of African American women](#) who used powder for feminine hygiene had more than a 40 percent increased risk of cancer.
- Companies like Johnson & Johnson (J&J) have long capitalized off of these known cultural norms, actively [targeting Black and Brown women](#) without disclosing the

potential risks associated with use even as **internal J&J documents** reference the possible carcinogenic effects of its talc-based powders.

Talc Asbestos

[Reuters Special Report: Johnson & Johnson knew for decades that asbestos lurked in its Baby Powder, Reuters \(12.14.18\)](#)

[Documents posted here](#)

- J&J didn't tell the FDA that at least three tests by three different labs from 1972 to 1975 had found asbestos in its talc – in one case at levels reported as “rather high.”
- A Reuters examination of court docs, deposition and trial testimony, shows that from at least 1971 to the early 2000s, the company's raw talc and finished powders sometimes tested positive for small amounts of asbestos, and that company executives, mine managers, scientists, doctors and lawyers fretted over the problem and how to address it while failing to disclose it to regulators or the public.
- The documents also depict successful efforts to influence U.S. regulators' plans to limit asbestos in cosmetic talc products and scientific research on the health effects of talc.

Baby Powder Battles: Johnson & Johnson Internal Documents Reveal Asbestos Worries
<https://bit.ly/2AIGwSt>

Women: Exposed and Silenced by Asbestos, by Linda Reinstein <http://bit.ly/2Uv6R69>

Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization press release responding to discontinued sale of talc
<https://bit.ly/3bQbsXU>

Dollar General Annual Shareholder Meeting recording. The talc question is in the Q&A section at the end, which may start around 20 minutes.
<https://east.virtualshareholdermeeting.com/vsm/web?pvskey=DG2020>

Breast Cancer Prevention Partners J&J Statement:

<https://www.bcpp.org/resource/big-win-for-public-health-johnson-johnson-to-stop-selling-iconic-baby-powder-in-the-u-s-canada-due-to-asbestos-contamination/>