



Advocacy Groups Celebrate Victory Against Johnson & Johnson

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Black Women for Wellness is celebrating the news that Johnson & Johnson will no longer sell products known to cause harm. However, the multinational giant's decision to discontinue global sales of talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder beginning in 2023 comes only after global pushback and a long heartfelt battle with Johnson & Johnson.

While we are pleased by Johnson & Johnson's recent announcement, it does not address our concerns as urgently or as completely as is necessary to ensure the health and wellbeing of communities globally. Black Women for Wellness, along with hundreds of other health, environmental, consumer and academic groups asked Johnson & Johnson to fully remove talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder from the entire global market; safely dispose of existing inventory, rather than shifting marketing and sales to low-income or marginalized communities, domestically or abroad; and cease production of the product globally. In other words, we ask for an immediate stop rather than plans for next year and a safe disposal of all existing inventory to prevent any further sales or consumption.

We thank our fellow advocates again for their efforts and dedication to building healthier communities globally, putting people over profits, and the health and wellbeing of Black women and girls. Asante sana. Breast Cancer Prevention Partners, Women's Voices of the Earth, Until Justice Data Partners, and WE ACT as the leading organizations helping secure this victory. When we fight we win, non governmental organizations and community based organizations globally united to fight for this hard earned victory. Without our united efforts, lifted voices and inspirational vision of a just world, this transnational corporation would continue to sell and target women of color and low income women for their toxic talc products.

"Our hearts ache for the people and families who have suffered from reproductive and breast cancers, yet we find hope with the community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations that join us in our commitment to the health and wellbeing of Black women and girls, Indigenous and people of color globally." Janette Robinson Flint, Executive Director, Black Women for Wellness. Over two years ago, Black Women for Wellness and 200 groups from 51 countries urged former Johnson & Johnson CEO Alex Gorsky to protect women's health – and especially Black women – by immediately ending global sales of its talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder. Testing has demonstrated the powder may be contaminated with asbestos, a known carcinogen.

As Reuters reported in 2018, "Johnson & Johnson knew for decades that asbestos lurked in its baby powder" and although the company later said its talc-based powder was asbestos free, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reported finding asbestos in Johnson's Baby Powder as recently as 2019. Read Johnson & Johnson's response letter [here](#).

Johnson & Johnson had previously discontinued sales of talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder in the U.S. Why? Because the demand for its talc-based products had dwindled due to mounting lawsuits that said it caused cancer. The company has faced over 38,000 lawsuits - many of them filed by Black and Brown women - who say their ovarian cancers are linked to their use of talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder.

As health concerns mounted over asbestos and talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder, documents unsealed in trials revealed that Johnson & Johnson focused its marketing on Black and Brown women. In fact, internal company documents suggest that as public concerns over talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder and its possible links to cancer grew, the company doubled down on aggressively marketing its talc-based Baby Powder to women of color, distributing free samples in Black churches and advertising on Spanish-language radio.

An internal Johnson & Johnson memo from 1992 acknowledged "negative publicity from the health community on talc (inhalation, dust, negative doctor endorsement, cancer linkage) continues" and simultaneously recommended increased marketing to Black and Hispanic women. This behavior is outrageous, especially given that Johnson & Johnson is a company that claims to champion global health equity and says they believe that racism in any form is unacceptable.

These racist actions are congruent with Johnson & Johnson's shameful history. As the British Medical Journal reported in March, documents unsealed in talcum powder litigation show that Johnson & Johnson "funded a 1971 study in which Pennsylvania prison inmates, most of them Black, were injected subcutaneously with asbestos." The company now says it "regrets" funding the study. To which, Black Women for Wellness says regret is not enough.

Since sending our letter to former CEO Alex Gorsky in 2020, our fight for justice for Black and Brown women and girls has persisted. Earlier this year, we urged Johnson & Johnson shareholders to vote YES on Resolutions 7 and 10 at its April 28th shareholder meeting. These shareholder resolutions would have directed the company to conduct an independent racial equity audit and end global sales of talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder, respectively. While shareholders did choose to vote in favor of conducting an independent racial equity audit, they unfortunately did not vote to end global sales of talc-based Johnson's Baby Powder, and therefore neither stood with communities of color nor became leaders in showing the world that racist and immoral business practices will not be tolerated.

Black Women for Wellness is a nonprofit organization committed to the health and well-being of Black women and girls through health education, empowerment and advocacy.

Quotes from partners:

"This is an important victory to be celebrated, but it also comes with decades of tragedy currently reflected in the 40,000 lawsuits many from women with ovarian cancer or mesothelioma who accuse Johnson & Johnson of selling talc baby powder all the while well aware of links to health risks and possible asbestos contamination," said Amber Garcia, Executive Director at Women's

Voices for the Earth. "Even with this announcement, J&J denies any wrong-doing and continues to defend the safety of their product."

"It took tens of thousands of lawsuits and two hundred NGOs to get J&J to finally do the right thing and end the global sale of its toxic talc," said Janet Nudelman, Director of Breast Cancer Prevention Partners Campaign for Safe Cosmetics. "It is hard to comprehend what took them so long," said Nudelman. "And hard *not* to wonder if the 2023 expected launch of J&J's new independent consumer company has something to do with the timing of this announcement, given how badly our Campaign has been tarnishing their brand."

As an organization founded and led by a Black woman, this campaign was personal for us. Until Justice Data Partners had no choice but to stand in solidarity with Black and Brown women and femmes all over the world. J&J knew their product was linked to cancer. They knew they were intentionally marketing this product on communities already facing multiple health disparities and disparities in access to healthcare. Instead of seeing Black and Brown women and femmes as worthy of long-healing lives, they saw us as disposal, and a way to make profit as we suffer and potentially die. We were, and are so thankful for the opportunity to join Black Women for Wellness LA and this coalition of healthy justice fighters. Although J&J is standing by their interpretation of the science, and ignoring the data linking asbestos-contaminated talc to cancer, we are thrilled the product will no longer be able to harm anyone. - Monica E. Unseld, Ph. D, MPH, Founder and Executive Director, Until Justice Data Partners (www.untiljusticedatapartners.org)

"We welcome the news that Johnson & Johnson will stop selling its talc-based baby powder globally, but feel they should do so immediately – not wait until next year," said Peggy Shepard, Co-Founder & Executive Director of WE ACT for Environmental Justice. "It's appalling when companies continue to sell something they know is toxic, something they stopped selling in the United States after more than 40,000 lawsuits about cancer-causing asbestos in their talc, marketing it overseas in countries that do not have the regulatory agencies and processes in place to adequately assess the impact of dangerous products."