

DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S CAUCUS

September 4, 2024

The Honorable Robert Califf, M.D.
Commissioner
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20903

Dear Commissioner Califf:

As members of the Democratic Women's Caucus, we write to urge you to swiftly address safety concerns over the ingredients in tampons and the potential health impacts.

In July 2024, a study by researchers at Columbia University, the University of California Berkeley, and Michigan State University, found the presence of sixteen potentially harmful metals in tampons sold by over a dozen unique brands.¹ Their study adds to a growing body of research about chemicals found in tampons.

A separate study has shown that the metals in tampons can be absorbed through contact, since tampons can cause tiny tears in the vagina, which may allow chemicals to enter the body.² A 2019 study published in *Environmental Health* observed that concentrations of blood mercury were higher among tampon users.³

Exposure to heavy metals can cause severe negative health effects, including damage to the cardiovascular system and liver, and an increased risk of cancer among many other complications.⁴ Metals are not the only harmful substance detected in tampons and other menstrual products; studies have also reported levels of “forever chemicals,” known as PFAS, in addition to phthalates and parabens. Women use about 7,400 tampons over the course of their reproductive years, so the presence of potentially harmful metals and chemicals in these products is incredibly concerning.⁵

¹ Shearston, J., Upson, K., Gordon, M., Do, V., Balac, O., Nguyen, K., Yan, B., Kioumourtoglou, M., Schilling, K. (2024). Tampons as a source of exposure to metal(loid)s, *Environment International*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412024004355#tblfn1>

² Nicole, W. (2014). A Question for Women's Health: Chemicals in Feminine Hygiene Products and Personal Lubricants. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/ehp.122-A70>

³ Singh, J., Mumford, S.L., Pollack, A.Z., Schisterman, E.F., Weisskopf, M.G., Navas-Acien, A., Kioumourtoglou, M.A. (2019). Tampon use, environmental chemicals and oxidative stress in the BioCycle study. *Environmental Health*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6371574/>

⁴ Treisman, Rachel (2024). “A study found toxic metals in popular tampon brands. Here's what experts advise” <https://www.npr.org/2024/07/11/nx-s1-5036484/tampons-heavy-metals-study>

⁵ *ibid.*

Since tampons are regulated as medical devices, manufacturers aren't required to disclose their chemical ingredients nor does the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) require ingredients used in menstrual products like tampons to meet any kind of safety standard. In 2021, New York became the first state to enact a menstrual product disclosure law requiring companies to list all intentionally added ingredients on packaging. Last year, California passed a similar law, but it gives manufacturers trade secret protections, so not all ingredients are necessarily disclosed. At least six other states have introduced legislation to address safety and disclosure of ingredients in these products.

The FDA must review and improve the current safety standards for tampons. We urge the FDA to take swift action to ensure that women are safe from harmful and toxic substances in tampons. We look forward to reviewing your plan to address these concerns and working with you on this issue.

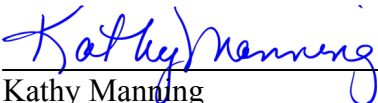
Sincerely,



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Kathy Manning
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Policy Task Force
Democratic Women's Caucus



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Policy Task Force
Democratic Women's Caucus