

Mary Ormsby

Walmart wants your daughter to put her best face forward — at recess.

The U.S. retailing giant is targeting grade schoolers with a cosmetics line for tweens. Among other benefits, the geoGIRL products are touted to have anti-aging ingredients.

Yes, for 8- to 12-year-olds.

There are 69 beauty items, including mascara, foundation, eye shadow, lip treatment and skin cleansers with eco-friendly packaging made to be held by smaller hands. The line is due to debut this month and, for now, will only be available in the United States.

It's a promotion that's raising lightly plucked eyebrows as adults wonder: Are tweens too young for makeup?

"What message are we sending to girls about their worth and what's important and valuable about them?" asks Juniper Glass, development director of the Montreal-based Girls Action Foundation.

What Glass finds offensive in the Walmart case is the marketing of makeup as a lifestyle for young girls, many of whom still think boys are icky and who are forming opinions about body image.

"Girls have always enjoyed dressing up and playing with makeup and self decoration, so I don't think that will ever cease because there's a fun aspect to it," Glass says. "But what's unfortunate about marketing to girls is the goal, really, for the people producing it, is to create consumers and increase profit."

Walmart would not address specific geoGIRL questions. A spokesperson responded to *Star* queries with this emailed statement:

"The geoGIRL line was developed in partnership with our customers to give parents a healthier, age-appropriate option for their tween girls who ask about wearing makeup. The decision of what is age appropriate to wear makeup rests solely with the parent.."

The cosmetics are advertised as safe for youthful skin, free of harmful chemicals and made with natural ingredients and antioxidants. Walmart is using it to replace the Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen line.

Pacific World produces the geoGIRL brand for Walmart. Joel Carden, Pacific World's executive vice-president, was quoted as saying the cosmetics "will create return purchases and create a true beauty consumer."

Pacific World told the *Star* that Carden was not taking media calls about geoGIRLS.

Charles Lynde, a dermatologist in Markham, frequently sees dermatitis, conjunctivitis and exacerbated acne in girls who don't know how to properly apply and wash off their makeup. "They aren't looking after their general hygiene around the eyes, they're not washing it off properly or are going to bed wearing it."

Janice Melanson, executive administrator of Breast Cancer Action Montreal, oversees a related website, [FemmeToxic](#), which is lobbying for safer makeup in Canada.



A Saudi woman applies makeup on a young girl on the sidelines of a beauty and style competition during the 2010 Cosmetic Expo, a four-day exhibition held for the first time in Saudi Arabia, at a hotel in the coastal city of Jeddah late on Dec. 21, 2010.

AMER HILABI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

“What (young women) are ingesting now really has a lot of effects on them because of the stage of hormonal development that they’re at — especially these tween girls — and it has not only effect for them but also for their future children as fetuses,” Melanson says.

“We’re concerned about what these 8-year-old girls are starting to put on their bodies.”

As for the notion that 8-year-olds need anti-aging potions?

Says Lynde: “The best anti-aging (practice) is to keep your kid out of the sun.”

---