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## Brown paper bag pretty

By Tanesha Slaughter

Many people are turning to lightening the color of their skin as a new trend across the world. It has become very popular in the Jamaican, Asian and now in the American culture. Society and cultural beliefs lead many to think that lightening their skin will lead to a better way of life. However, the dangers and long term effects, can potentially put those at risk for serious health issues.

Creams, soaps, ointments, and powders have all been used in the illegal black market of skin bleaching. These agents contain high doses of hydroquinone, mercury, and corticosteroids that decreases or stops melanin production.

Hydroquinone has been banned in Europe and other parts of the world, however, it can be found over the counter in 2 percent doses and available by prescription in 4 percent doses in the US. Studies have shown that hydroquinone should not be used for prolonged periods due to the carcinogenic affects, according to fda.gov.

Using hydroquinone for an extended amount of time can cause ochronosis which is a condition that causes dark, bluish black patches of discoloration on the skin. Like hydroquinone, mercury was banned in Europe and US for use in cosmetic products because it is poison to the human body.

Mercury can cause headaches, kidney damage, memory loss, and can still be found in the body after death, according to usgs.gov. Along with mercury and hydroquinone, corticosteroids also should not be used for prolonged periods of time.

Corticosteroids are normally prescribed by a doctor for eczema or other dermatological uses. It is illegal to use for skin lightening. The use of corticosteroids can cause bacteria/fungal infections, excessive hair

growth, and thinning of the skin, according to medicinenet.com. Although these three ingredients are banned in certain areas, it can be found combined together or separately in dangerously high doses in the illegal black market in nations around the world.

Famous reggae artist Vybz Kartel has undergone some form of skin bleaching that has turned his color from a dark chocolate to a light pale complexion. He boasts about his skin discoloration in his song "Cake Soap" which he describes as his way of bleaching his skin, according to hiphopwired.com.

What many fail to realize is that melanin is one of the natural way of human survival. Melanin is produced by cells called melanocytes. When a person is exposed to the sun, melanin protects the skin from sun damage. Melanin is what gives pigment to the skin, hair, and eye color. The darker the skin, the more melanin production, and more protection against the sun. Darker skin also has a lower development of cancer, however it is not impossible for darker skinned people to get cancer, according to who.int. When interfering with this process it may potentially cause symptoms of Cushings disease or cancer.