

eyeliner

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Eyeliner

Pigment drawn along the lash line to define the eye. Eyeliner is the oldest cosmetic still in use in recognisable form — Egyptian tomb evidence puts it well before 3000 BC — and it is the product applied closest to the eye, which makes both its formulation and its hygiene unusually consequential.

The formats

Format	Behaviour	Best for
Pencil (wood or mechanical)	Waxy, soft, blendable	Smudged looks, the waterline, beginners
Gel pot	Dense pigment, sets firm	Sharp lines, control, longevity
Liquid (felt tip or brush)	The sharpest line, unforgiving	Wings, graphic looks
Powder	Softest, applied with an angled brush	Diffused definition
Kohl / kajal	Traditional, very soft	See Kohl and Kajal

Modern pencils are pigment in a wax and oil base. Liquid and gel liners add **film formers** — acrylates copolymers, styrene/acrylates, PVP — which is why they resist water and sebum and why they take a

proper remover to shift.

The waterline

Lining the **waterline** — the wet rim of the lid, between the lashes and the eye — is common and carries the highest risk of anything in makeup.

- **The meibomian glands open onto that rim.** They secrete the oily layer of the tear film that stops tears evaporating. Repeated occlusion by waxy product is associated with meibomian gland dysfunction, and that is the leading cause of evaporative dry eye.
- **Product migrates directly into the tear film**, which is why liner ends up in the eye and why particles are recoverable from tears after application.
- **Contamination goes straight to the ocular surface.** A pencil used on the waterline and then stored in a warm bag is a swab.

If you line the waterline: use a product intended for it, **sharpen the pencil before every use** to expose fresh material, never share it, replace it often, and remove it completely at night. Anyone with dry eye, blepharitis, or contact lenses should think harder about it.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic — FDA primary category **(03) eye makeup preparations**. Three specific constraints:

- **Only colour additives approved for eye-area use** may be present. This is the restriction that shapes the shelf: intense blues, greens and purples in eyeliner are made with permitted inorganics — ultramarines, chromium oxides, ferric ferrocyanide, manganese violet — rather than the certified organic lakes used on lips.
- **Kohl containing lead is prohibited**, and imported traditional preparations are the recurring problem. See [Kohl and Kajal](#).
- The **mercury carve-out** — mercury compounds are prohibited in cosmetics except as a preservative in eye-area products at **≤65 ppm**, and only where no other safe and effective preservative is available.

Under MoCRA, the **small-business exemption from registration and listing does not apply** to products that regularly contact the mucous membrane of the eye.

Shelf life

- **Liquid and gel liners: three to six months after opening.** Water-containing, in a tube or pot that the applicator returns to after touching the eye. This is the shortest life in the catalogue after [Mascara](#).
- **Pencils: up to a year or more**, because sharpening removes the contaminated surface. That is the real reason a sharpener is a hygiene tool.
- **Powder: 18–24 months.**

The rule that overrides all of them: **stop using every eye product at the first sign of an eye infection, discard the ones in use, and see a clinician.** Never share eyeliner, and treat store testers as contaminated.

Related

- [Makeup](#) — the shelf this sits on, and the rest of it.
- [Cosmetics](#) — what the label is legally allowed to say, and the full catalogue.
- The rest of *Eyes* — [Eyeshadow](#) · [Eyeshadow Primer](#) · [Kohl and Kajal](#) · [Mascara](#) · [Lash Primer](#) · [False Eyelashes](#) · [Eyelash Adhesive](#) · [Eyelash Serum](#) · [Eye Makeup Remover](#) · [Eyelash Cleanser](#).
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.