

# eyeshadow

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## Eyeshadow

Coloured powder or cream for the eyelid. Eyeshadow is where the US colour additive rules bite hardest, because the **eye area has its own approved palette** — shorter than the one available to the rest of the face — and that single fact explains most of the differences between a US, EU and Asian shadow shelf.

## What is in it

| Class                       | Doing what                           | Names                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Filler / base</b>        | Bulk, slip, blendability             | Talc, mica, sericite, silica, boron nitride                                                         |
| <b>Pigment</b>              | The colour                           | Iron oxides, titanium dioxide, ultramarines, chromium oxides, manganese violet, ferric ferrocyanide |
| <b>Pearl / interference</b> | Shimmer and duochrome                | Coated mica, synthetic fluorphlogopite, bismuth oxychloride                                         |
| <b>Binder</b>               | Holds a pressed pan together         | Magnesium stearate, esters, dimethicone                                                             |
| <b>Preservative</b>         | Low water activity, so little needed | Phenoxyethanol, or none                                                                             |

**Boron nitride is the ingredient that separates a good pressed shadow from a chalky one.** It is a soft platelet that improves adhesion and blendability, and its presence high on a list is a reasonable quality signal.

## The eye-area colour rule

In the US, colour additives may only be used where FDA has approved them, and approval is **use-specific**. The eye area has its own list, and several colours widely used elsewhere are not on it.

The consequence people actually notice: **most FD&C certified lakes are not approved for eye-area use in the US**, which is why intensely saturated pinks, purples, blues and reds are harder to find in US-market eyeshadow than in imported palettes. Brands achieve those shades with permitted inorganic pigments — ultramarines, chromium oxides, manganese violet, ferric ferrocyanide — which behave differently and often sit less brightly.

Imported palettes sold into the US that use non-approved colours are **adulterated** under the FD&C Act, whatever their origin. This is a real and recurring enforcement subject, not a technicality.

In the EU the equivalent instrument is the **Annex IV** closed positive list of permitted colorants — 153 entries — with its own use restrictions, and the two lists do not match.

## Formats

Pressed powder is the default. Loose pigment gives the most intense payoff and the most fallout, and should be pressed on with a flat brush rather than swept. Cream shadow lasts well on dry lids and creases on oily ones without a [Eyeshadow Primer](#). Liquid and glitter shadows use a film former, which is what makes glitter stay put.

**Glitter must be cosmetic-grade.** Craft glitter is cut plastic with sharp edges and is a genuine corneal abrasion hazard.

## Where it sits in the rules

**Cosmetic** — FDA primary category **(03) eye makeup preparations**, or **(04) children's eye makeup preparations**. Beyond the colour rules:

- The **mercury exception** applies here: mercury compounds are prohibited in cosmetics except as a preservative in eye-area products at **no more than 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.
- FDA's December 2022 final guidance recommends a maximum of **10 ppm lead** in externally applied cosmetics.

## Shelf life

Powder shadows are low-water and keep **18–24 months** after opening. The limit in practice is the **brush**, which returns oil and skin flora to the pan and eventually glazes it. Cream and liquid shadows: **12 months**.

The eye-area rule overrides all of it: **stop using every eye product at the first sign of an eye infection, discard the ones in use, and see a clinician.** Never share eye makeup, 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 Primer](#) · [Eyeliner](#) · [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.