

setting spray

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Setting Spray

A fine mist applied over finished makeup to hold it in place. Unlike a [Face Mist](#), which is water and humectants, a setting spray contains **film-forming polymers** — and that is the entire difference between a product that sets makeup and one that refreshes it.

How it works

The spray deposits a thin, flexible polymer film across the whole face. As the solvent flashes off, the polymer chains knit into a continuous layer that:

- **Binds powder and pigment** so they resist transfer and movement.
- **Resists water and sebum** to varying degrees, depending on the polymer.
- **Melts the powdery look**, because a continuous film scatters light more evenly than a bed of loose particles. This is the reason makeup looks more like skin after a mist, and it is an optical effect rather than a hydrating one.

Class	Doing what	Names
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Film former	The whole job	PVP, VP/VA copolymer, acrylates copolymer, polyurethane-35
Solvent	Carries and evaporates	Water, alcohol denat., butylene glycol
Plasticiser	Keeps the film flexible rather than crackly	Glycerin, PEGs
Sensory	Feel, scent, finish	Silicones, silica, fragrance

Setting, finishing, or fixing

Three overlapping names for products that differ mostly in polymer load:

- **Setting spray** — moderate hold, applied to lock makeup after application.
- **Finishing spray** — light, aimed at the optical effect and the finish rather than longevity.
- **Fixing spray** — heavy hold, alcohol-forward, aimed at stage, film, humidity and long wear. These are the ones that genuinely resist a long night, and they are also the most drying and most likely to disturb makeup on contact.

Using it

- **Hold at arm's length** — about 20–25 cm — and mist in a broad pass, not a concentrated jet. Close the eyes and mouth.
- **Let it dry undisturbed.** Touching a wet film is how makeup gets moved after being set.
- **Two light passes beat one heavy one.** A soaked face reactivates the makeup underneath and produces streaks.
- **It cannot rescue a bad base.** A setting spray fixes what is there; it does not improve a mismatched foundation or an over-powdered finish.
- **Do not inhale the cloud,** and mist in a ventilated space.

Alcohol, briefly

Alcohol denat. is common and does useful work — fast evaporation, a crisper film, less disturbance of the makeup on contact. It also dries the skin over repeated use and stings on compromised or freshly exfoliated skin. Alcohol-free versions exist, dry more slowly, and generally hold slightly less.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic — FDA primary category (08), makeup preparations (not eye). No monograph applies.

The rule that does apply is the **aerosol warning statement at 21 CFR 740.11** for cosmetics in self-pressurised containers: warnings against puncturing or incinerating, against storage above 120 °F, and against use near flame, plus additional wording for flammable propellants and for products used near the face. Most setting sprays are pump misters rather than pressurised aerosols and fall outside that requirement — but a compressed-gas version carries it.

The other constraint is **fragrance**: this is a product sprayed at the face, near the eyes, daily. In the EU, individually named fragrance allergens must appear in the ingredient list, and the list requiring declaration was substantially expanded by Regulation (EU) 2023/1545.

Shelf life

Twelve months after opening. The nozzle touches nothing, which makes the format relatively robust; the failure mode is a **clogged nozzle** spitting droplets instead of misting, which ruins makeup rather than endangering anyone. Rinse the nozzle. Any cloudiness in a clear product means it has been colonised.

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- [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 *Face* — [Face Primer](#) · [Foundation](#) · [BB Cream](#) · [CC Cream](#) · [Tinted Moisturiser](#) · [Concealer](#) · [Colour Corrector](#) · [Face Powder](#) · [Setting Powder](#).
- [Face Mist](#) — the one without polymers, doing a different job.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.