

White fright: burns and multicoloured teeth

■ Neil McMahon

Easy access to do-it-yourself teeth-whitening products with up to three times the "safe" level of hydrogen peroxide is putting Australian consumers at risk of serious internal damage, dentists warn.

Ten months after the federal consumer watchdog placed restrictions on the levels of dangerous chemicals in products sold and used locally, dentists are still waging a long-running battle for a crackdown on an industry that has exploded here in the past decade. Among their concerns is the easy online availability of products that breach the standards imposed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission last June.

Dr Peter Alldritt, who heads the oral health committee of the Australian Dental Association, says online purchases put consumers at risk of burning their gums and stomach by buying products with high levels of hydrogen peroxide. Fairfax Media found products for sale online with almost three times the ACCC-imposed safety standard of 6 per cent hydrogen peroxide.

"The Therapeutic Goods Administration doesn't filter the things that people are importing themselves," Dr Alldritt said.

"If a dentist imports something to use on a patient, we've got to get TGA approval to import it and use it on patients. But if a member of the public wants to buy something on the internet for their own use, the



Eyes open wide: Melbourne dentist Kat Marhfour warns against DIY products Photo: Ken Irwin

TGA doesn't have any regulation over that.

"The public needs to be aware that these products either might not work at all, in which case they're

wasting their money, or may cause them serious harm because of the concentration being inappropriate."

The ADA wants the Dental Board of Australia to push for tougher reg-

ulation of the industry in general. But the board only has the power to regulate the conduct of dentists and can do nothing about practitioners such as beauticians. A board

spokeswoman told Fairfax Media any product with a concentration of hydrogen peroxide of more than 6 per cent should only be used by a dentist. "The Dental Board of Australia recommends that anyone wishing to whiten their teeth make an appointment with a registered dental practitioner."

Melbourne dentist Kat Marhfour said the proliferation of untrained practitioners and DIY products – particularly those bought online – was a concern. At the Smile Solutions clinic in the CBD, she said, dentists conducted a full examination before doing teeth whitening.

"With my own patients I always do a full dental assessment. These patients are going online and purchasing these products without having a clean bill of health before going ahead and starting these whitening procedures. These products need to be used according to the recommendations of the dentist. It is very concerning that people can go [online] and buy these products unsupervised."

Dr Alldritt said customers had to be aware that not everyone was a suitable candidate for teeth whitening due to other issues with their oral health, such as sensitive gums.

"They may end up getting teeth that are multicoloured because some of the tooth enamel has whitened but none of the fillings have. So they've now got to go to a dentist and say, 'Can you replace everything because I've now got multicoloured teeth?'"