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California Jury Awards $34.21M Against J&J in Mesothelioma Case

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A Northern California jury found on Monday that Johnson & Johnson failed to warn consumers about asbestos contamination in its baby powder and awarded $34.21 million to a man who later developed mesothelioma, a cancer linked to asbestos exposure.

After an eight-week trial and two days of deliberation, jurors assigned 40 percent of the responsibility to J&J and 60 percent to Merck & Co. Inc's Dr. Scholl's, which settled before trial.

Kevin Reikes, a Sacramento-area communications executive, testified at trial that he regularly used talcum powder, including J&J's baby powder, beginning in the 1970s.

Reikes was diagnosed with mesothelioma in June 2025. He began chemotherapy within a month and has since undergone abdominal and chest surgeries in an effort to treat the disease and stop its spread.

The jury found that J&J's baby powder was defective and the company was negligent in its failure to warn consumers and that its failure caused Reikes' cancer.

Sam Iola of Dallas-based Iola, Gross & Forbes-King represented Reikes.

"Johnson & Johnson knew about the dangers of asbestos and the potential for contamination in its talc products, yet it continued selling those products without warning consumers," Iola said in a news release. "The evidence presented at trial showed that protecting the Johnson's Baby Powder brand took priority over the safety of the people who used it."

Shawna Forbes-King of Iola, Gross & Forbes-King said the "physical, emotional and financial toll" Reikes and his family are facing could have been prevented.

"This verdict is about the devastating consequences for Kevin and his family of a company's failure to warn consumers about a known danger," Forbes-King said in a news release.

Alameda County Superior Court Judge Jamilah Jefferson presided over the trial.

Aviva Wein, worldwide vice president and Head of Litigation for Johnson & Johnson, said that the company plans to appeal.

“The plaintiff lawyers failed to present even the most basic supporting evidence for their case: multiple witnesses, including members of plaintiff’s own family, testified under oath that they never saw him use Johnson’s Baby Powder nor discussed any such use with him. This ‘fact’ surfaced only after litigation counsel was retained,” Wein said in a statement to *The Texas Lawbook*.

“Without evidence to support their case, plaintiff’s attorneys relied on litigation-driven opinions that have repeatedly been disproven. In fact, decades of scientific research demonstrate Johnson’s Baby Powder does not contain asbestos and does not cause cancer. We remain confident that the evidence and the science support the safety of our products and will continue to vigorously defend these cases.”

Iola responded to J&J’s statement by saying the “Plaintiffs intend to prevail on their claims at the appellate level, just as they did with the jury at the trial court level.”

This is the second multimillion-dollar jury verdict against the pharmaceutical giant in the last week. **On Friday**, a Massachusetts jury awarded $3.3 million against J&J, finding its baby powder caused a woman’s mesothelioma, but not her death.

Julia Romano of Kirkland & Ellis represented J&J. She did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The case number is 25CV157993.