



## CRITICAL HYGIENE PRACTICES: Hand Sanitizer

When soap and water are not readily available use Hand Sanitizer, with at least 60% alcohol. Do not use Hand Sanitizer for visibly soiled hands; they must be washed with soap and water first.

- Children must be supervised when using Hand Sanitizer.
- Hand Sanitizer should be kept out of the reach of children in a secure location.
- Swallowing just a tiny amount of hand sanitizer can cause alcohol poisoning in children.

Hand sanitizers typically contain ethyl alcohol, isopropyl alcohol or benzalkonium alcohol (Purell and Germ-X). Ethyl alcohol hand sanitizers contain 60–65% ethanol.

This is a very high alcohol content, which can lead to alcohol poisoning. To put it into perspective, consuming an 8-ounce (240 ml) bottle of hand sanitizer is the equivalent of five shots of hard liquor.

If a toddler licks and ingests some hand sanitizer, it will taste bad but not be toxic. Even if a toddler ingests one tiny squirt, it will not cause any serious injuries.

However, ingesting several squirts of hand sanitizer will make a toddler intoxicated. Too much can lead to vomiting, liver damage, low blood sugar, seizures, coma and death.

Since hand sanitizer has a high alcohol content, and is cheap, easy to purchase and has no age limit for purchase, it has become a popular choice for teens experimenting with substance abuse. Teens may intentionally ingest large quantities of hand sanitizer to get drunk – which can lead to serious medical outcomes including alcohol poisoning and death.

If you or your child experience nausea, vomiting, headaches, blurred vision, or worse symptoms after using hand sanitizer, or a suspected ingestion, seek immediate medical treatment.

**Poison Control 1-800-222-1222.**

### **When using alcohol-based hand sanitizer:**

- ✓ Put product on hands and rub hands together
- ✓ Cover all surfaces until hands feel dry
- ✓ This should take around 20 seconds

## **Hand sanitizer & COVID-19**

As families began buying more hand sanitizer during the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Poison Data System started getting more reports of unintentional exposures in children. In the first half of 2020, there have been 46% more [reported cases about hand sanitizer](#) than during the same time last year. Many reports were about children ages 5 years and younger.

Health experts recommend using hand sanitizer that is 60% to 95% alcohol to kill the virus that causes COVID-19. Drinking alcohol typically has 5% to 40% alcohol.

### **Check the label**

The [Food and Drug Administration](#) (FDA) began letting companies that do not normally produce hand sanitizer make and sell it during the COVID-19 pandemic. When buying hand sanitizer, parents should make sure it has a label that lists the ingredients, warnings and precautions.

To reduce the risk of injury from children drinking hand sanitizers, producers should add ingredients to make them taste bitter. This important step helps prevent children from eating the product. However, the FDA has been alerted that some young people have tried drinking hand sanitizers from distilleries that have not taken the step to make them taste bad.

To help make sure the sanitizer's taste will not appeal to children, look for the word "denatured" on the bottle. You can also check for bitter ingredients such as denatonium benzoate (Bitrex); sucrose octaacetate; or butanol (also called tert-butyl alcohol).

Some products are made with isopropyl alcohol (isopropanol). Be especially careful with these sanitizers around children, since they can be more toxic than those made with ethanol or ethyl alcohol.

### **[Food & Drug Administration \(FDA\) Hand Sanitizer Warnings](#)**

**[FDA – Hand Sanitizers Consumers Should Not Use](#)**: Product may be toxic or sub potent meaning not enough alcohol product to be effective against the germs.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Keep-Hand-Sanitizer-Out-of-Childrens-Reach.aspx>

<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-updates-hand-sanitizers-consumers-should-not-use>

<https://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/providers/index.htm>

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