

# Dept. of Health Services: State Poison Center and Health Agency issue warning about certain hand sanitizers

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As the use of hand sanitizers has increased during the [COVID 19 pandemic](#), so has the number of calls to poison centers related to possible toxic alcohol exposures. More hand sanitizer is being produced, either at home or in other countries, and it can contain a variety of chemicals and alcohols that can be dangerous, if not deadly.

There has been a dramatic increase in hand sanitizer products, labeled to contain ethanol (also known as ethyl alcohol) but that have actually tested positive for methanol contamination. Methanol, or wood alcohol, is a substance that can be toxic when absorbed through the skin or ingested, and can be life-threatening. New Mexico Poison Control recently reported three deaths and one case of permanent blindness due to ingestion of methanol contaminated hand sanitizers.

“Hand sanitizer is great to use when soap and water aren’t available, but frequent, thorough [handwashing](#) is the best way to prevent spreading viruses like COVID-19,” said Stephanie Smiley, interim State Health Officer. “If you must use hand sanitizer, be sure to [avoid any products on the The Food and Drug Administration’s \(FDA\) list of hand sanitizers that have been recalled\(link is external\).](#)”

Doctor David Gummin, Medical Director of the [Wisconsin Poison Center\(link is external\)](#), has this advice for anyone who uses hand sanitizers:

- Use only as directed on hands. The accidental ingestion of even a relatively

small amount of methanol by children may pose a serious poisoning risk. Symptoms of methanol poisoning are nausea, vomiting, headache, blurred vision, permanent blindness, seizures, coma, permanent damage to the nervous system or death.

- There is concern for poisoning related to the most common ingredient in hand sanitizers, ethyl alcohol. These products typically contain over 60% ethyl alcohol, a stronger concentration than most hard liquors. A child ingesting any more than a lick or a taste of this product could be at risk for alcohol poisoning. Ingestion of as little as an ounce or two could be fatal in a small child.
- If you or a child accidentally swallows hand sanitizer, call the Wisconsin Poison Center right away. Don't wait for symptoms to develop. Call the Poison Center at 800-222-1222 anytime day or night.

Visit the [FDA\(link is external\)](#) website for more information.