

Alert: Methanol-based Hand Sanitizers

Potential Dangers of Use

BLUF

The US Food and Drug Administration has issued a warning to consumers and health care providers concerning hand sanitizer products labeled as containing ethyl alcohol/ethanol, but which actually are made with methanol. Methanol is potentially toxic when ingested or absorbed through the skin, and can lead to blindness, hospitalizations, and other life-threatening complications.

Background

Alcohol Based Hand Sanitizers or Rubs (ABHSR) have grown in importance with the COVID-19 pandemic, where one of the predominant pieces of advice to mitigate the spread of the disease is to either wash your hands for 20 seconds in soap and water, or if unable, to use a sanitizer solution for 20 seconds, and then let the solution air dry. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has determined that ABHSR with at least 60% ethanol by volume will denature the lipid envelope of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus exposing and destroying the internal RNA strand.

In June 2020, CDC working with the New Mexico Department of Health and New Mexico Poison and Drug Information Center confirmed serious adverse health events that occurred in seven patients supposedly by ingestion (swallowing). Several deaths resulted from this outbreak, one was permanently blinded. Two others are still critically ill. In addition, six patients in Arizona were similarly stricken.

All of these cases were attributed to ingesting the ABHSR solution, but it is worth noting that repeated topical use (use on the skin without swallowing the solution) can result in significant quantities of methanol being absorbed through the skin and can lead to similar medical issues.

The majority of commercial ABHSR are manufactured with ethanol or isopropanol, both of which are safe and effective. However, several manufacturers from Mexico (at least so far) have substituted methanol in their solutions.

The latest FDA update, as well as FDA testing and manufacturer/distributor recall information may be found at: https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-updates-hand-sanitizers-methanol?deliveryName=USCDC_511-DM32443

IF You believe you have been in contact with a methanol-based hand sanitizer, seek care immediately from your healthcare provider or an emergency room. Take the bottle of the product with you for assay. To reiterate, the potential outcomes of ingestion or absorption are severe and life-threatening.

REFERENCE: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00434.asp>