Ohio Department of Health Issues Warning About Methanol-based Hand Sanitizers

Toxic alcohol can cause poisoning with repeated use, blindness or death when swallowed

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Department of Health is warning consumers about the presence of hand sanitizers that contain unlisted methanol as an ingredient. Methanol is a toxic alcohol that can cause poisoning when absorbed through the skin and blindness or death when swallowed.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), there has been a sharp increase in hand sanitizer products that are labeled to contain the commonly used ethanol (also known as ethyl alcohol) but have tested positive for methanol contamination.

Most commercially available alcohol-based hand sanitizers or rubs contain either ethanol or isopropanol as active ingredients. Methanol (or wood alcohol) is not an acceptable active ingredient.

Repeated use of methanol-containing hand sanitizer on the skin may result in methanol poisoning. However, the highest risk is to people who swallow the products. This could include young children who accidentally swallow the sanitizer and adolescents or adults who intentionally swallow it as an alcohol substitute.

The effects of methanol and ethanol poisoning are similar — headache, blurred vision or blindness, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, loss of coordination, decreased alertness — but methanol poisoning may result in severe buildup of acid in the body or death.

The FDA has found the ingredient or suspects it may be present in 17 products manufactured by Mexican-based companies Eskbiochem SA de CV; AAA Cosmetica; Grupo Insoma, S.A.P.I de CV; Soluciones Cosmeticas SA de CV; Transliquid Technologies; and Tropicosmeticos SA de CV. A full list of product names, can be found at https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-updates-hand-sanitizers-methanol. The agency is working with manufacturers and distributors on a voluntary recall of these products.

Consumers should:

- Check their hand sanitizer against products on the list. If a product is on the list, stop using it and dispose of it in appropriate hazardous waste containers. Do not flush it or pour it down the drain.
- Seek immediate medical attention and call the National Poison Control Center Hotline (1-800-222-1222) if they have swallowed hand sanitizer or are experiencing symptoms from repeated use of one of the listed products. Symptoms include headache, blurred vision or blindness, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, loss of coordination, and decreased alertness.
- NEVER swallow ANY hand sanitizer and use it only for its intended purpose — to clean hands.
- Keep alcohol-based hand sanitizers out of the reach of children and supervise use.
Ohio Governor Mike DeWine’s concern about poison prevention is long-standing. While serving in the U.S. Senate, he wrote the law that established the National Poison Control Center Hotline, 1-800-222-1222.

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