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From: Ron Kirschner, MD, Medical Director  
To: ALL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS  
Subject: Methanol-based hand sanitizers  
Date: 7/20/20

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- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers or rubs (ABHSR) typically contain ethanol or isopropyl alcohol as the active ingredient, but during the current pandemic these products have been in short supply.
- Individuals with alcohol use disorder sometimes ingest these products when standard alcoholic beverages are not available.
- In June, 2020 a number of ABHSR products sold in the southwestern US were found to contain methanol.
- Methanol causes delayed toxicity through its metabolite formic acid. The main target organs are the CNS and retina.
- Three people died and one became blind after drinking methanol-based hand sanitizer in New Mexico last month (CNN).
- Methanol toxicity has rarely been reported through prolonged dermal exposure, or inhalation in poorly ventilated areas during extended occupational exposure. However, the vast majority of patients who develop methanol toxicity do so through ingestion.
- The primary risk with ABHSR products is intentional ingestion as an alcohol substitute. There is also a risk of accidental ingestion, such as in young children.
- Note that patients may store hand sanitizers in secondary containers, and even if original containers are available listing of ingredients may be incomplete.
- We recommend that patients be advised to dispose of any hand sanitizer products that are thought to be methanol-based.
- Please contact the Poison Center with any suspected cases. We can help determine if serial labs, other diagnostic studies, or treatments are needed.

#### References

<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-updates-hand-sanitizers-methanol>

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

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/27/us/new-mexico-hand-sanitizer-deaths-trnd/index.html>

**Our nurse and pharmacist certified specialists in poison information and physician toxicologists are available 24 hours a day to answer your questions.**