



Georgia Poison Center

Grady Health System • 80 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive, SE • Box 26066 • Atlanta, GA 30303-3050 • www.georgiapoisoncenter.org
POISON HELP: 1.800.222.1222 • ADMINISTRATION: 404.616.9237 • FAX: 404.616.6657 • EDUCATION: 404.616.9235

September 8, 2015

Georgia School Systems
RE: Hand Sanitizer

Recently, the Georgia Poison Center and Georgia Emergency Rooms have noticed a troubling new trend, children drinking hand sanitizer.

Frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of germs. When soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers are commonly used. Hand sanitizers seem to be everywhere and have been associated with a significant reduction in microorganisms on the skin. They are inexpensive and convenient, though not without danger.

Hand sanitizers will either be alcohol based (ethyl alcohol or isopropyl alcohol) or non-alcohol based (benzalkonium chloride). Isopropyl alcohol is commonly known as rubbing alcohol. The concern for poisoning relates to the ethyl alcohol, also called ethanol. It is the same alcohol found in beer, wine and other liquors, as well as perfumes, after shave lotions and mouthwash but at a much higher concentration. The concentration of alcohol in hand sanitizers varies from 45% to 95%, with the most commonly used in the range of 60-70%.

Drinking ethanol-based hand sanitizer can cause alcohol poisoning, sending children to the emergency room. A young child ingesting any more than a couple of mouthfuls of this product could be at risk for alcohol poisoning. Symptoms can range from confusion, vomiting, drowsiness, slow or irregular breathing, blue-tinged or pale skin, low body temperature, and low blood sugars.

The Georgia Poison Center recommends that children **NOT** be in possession of hand sanitizers. If this product is required by the schools, it should be stored in a safe place by the teacher and used only with careful adult supervision. Other recommendations would include using non-alcohol based products and/or using hand sanitizing wipes.

All hand sanitizing products are safe and effective when used properly but there is a potential for abuse. The alcohol used in the product has been altered to make it taste bad but this may not discourage some children from purposely drinking hand sanitizer in order to "get a buzz", "get drunk" or from a dare. Teachers and parents should be aware of this and be on the lookout for any abuse.

If it is suspected that someone has swallowed some hand sanitizer, the Georgia Poison Center should be contacted immediately by dialing **1-800-222-1222**. Telephone lines are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by doctors, pharmacists, nurses, toxicologists and poison information specialists. Our service is free and the information provided to us is kept private and confidential.

Respectfully,

Gaylord P. Lopez, Pharm.D., DABAT
Diplomat, American Board of Applied Toxicology Director, Georgia Poison Center and
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Pharmacy,
Mercer University School of Pharmacy

Certified as a Regional Poison Center by the American Association of Poison Control Centers

