Healthcare Professional Q&A on
Hand Sanitizer Use

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ADMINISTRATION

The FDA is working with U.S. government partners including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), medical product manufacturers, and international partners to address the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. Find the most recent FDA updates on our Coronavirus Disease 2019 page. FDA has provided our health care stakeholders with additional information and responses to commonly asked questions that your patients and consumers may ask about hand sanitizer.

Q. What should I tell my patients about hand sanitizer use? Is consumer hand sanitizer effective against COVID-19?

A. The best way for patients to prevent the spread of infections and decrease the risk of getting sick is by washing their hands with plain soap and water, advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is essential, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing one's nose. If soap and water are not available, CDC recommends consumers use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Currently, there are no FDA-approved drugs, including hand sanitizers, for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Q. Given the current concerns with methanol and 1-propanol, my patients have asked about making their own hand sanitizer. What is FDA's recommendation on making hand sanitizer at home?

A. FDA recommends that consumers do not make their own hand sanitizer. If made incorrectly, hand sanitizer can be potentially dangerous, and there have been reports of skin burns from homemade hand sanitizer. The agency lacks verifiable information on the methods being used to prepare hand sanitizer at home and whether they are safe for use on human skin.

Q. How do I report any adverse events with hand sanitizer experienced by my patients?

A. FDA encourages patients, consumers and health professionals to report adverse events experienced with the use of hand sanitizers to FDA's MedWatch Adverse Event Reporting program:

- Complete and submit the report online
- Download and complete the form, then submit it via fax at 1-800-FDA-0178.
- Include as much information as you can about the product, including the product name, the manufacturer, and the lot number (if available).

Q. My patients have asked about using household cleaners to prevent COVID-19. Many surface cleaners and disinfectants say they can be used against SARS-CoV-2.

A. Always follow the instructions on household cleaners. Do not use

disinfectant sprays or wipes on your skin, because they may cause skin and eye irritation. Disinfectant sprays or wipes are not intended for use on humans or animals. Disinfectant sprays or wipes are intended for use on hard, non-porous surfaces.

There are specific cleaning products, which are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), available for use against SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19. View the current list of products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2. See Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions for more information.

Q. I'm a pediatrician and parents have asked about using hand sanitizer on their kids. Is hand sanitizer dangerous for children?

A. For children under six years of age, hand sanitizer should be used with adult supervision according to the directions on the drug facts label.

Hand sanitizer is dangerous when ingested by children and adults drinking only a small amount of hand sanitizer can cause alcohol poisoning in children. It is also important to keep the product out of the eyes.

Every month, there are hundreds of calls to Poison Control for unintentional ingestion of hand sanitizer. In March 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic), calls to Poison Control related to hand sanitizer increased by 79% compared to March of 2019. The majority of these calls were for unintentional exposures in children 5 years of age and younger. It is very important to store hand sanitizer out of reach and monitor children when they are using hand sanitizer.

Q. Is the spraying of aerosolized disinfectant onto humans via tunnels, walkways, chambers and similar systems effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19?

A. FDA does not recommend spraying humans with aerosolized disinfectant. There are currently no data to demonstrate that this method is effective in treating or reducing the spread of COVID-19.

Surface disinfectants or sprays should not be used on humans or animals. They are intended for use on hard, non-porous surfaces. CDC provides information regarding disinfectant practices for surfaces in the Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes. CDC states you should never eat, drink, breathe or inject disinfectants into your body or apply directly to your skin as they can cause serious harm.

Human antiseptic drugs, such as those permitted in hand sanitizers, are intended for use on human skin but are not intended for aerosolization. FDA's temporary policies for alcohol-based hand sanitizers specifically do not apply to aerosol sprays due to the risk of inhalational toxicity and flammability, among other potential safety concerns. In addition, hand sanitizers are intended for use on the hands, and should not be used over larger body surfaces, ingested, inhaled, or injected.

Q. What are the risks of using a hand sanitizer that contains methanol (wood alcohol) or 1-propanol?

A: The FDA is warning consumers and health care professionals about hand sanitizers contaminated with potentially toxic types of alcohol. FDA has published a list of hand sanitizers consumers should not use and it is regularly updating this list to help protect consumers from harm. Methanol, also known as wood alcohol, is a dangerous and toxic substance. Methanol can cause serious side effects when absorbed through the skin and can cause blindness or death when swallowed.

1-propanol, or 1-propyl alcohol, is used to make industrial solvents (a type of cleaner) and can also be toxic to humans when swallowed. Swallowing or drinking a hand sanitizer with 1-propanol can result in decreased breathing and heart rate, among other serious symptoms, and can lead to death. Learn more about potential side effects.

Q: How can I check if my hand sanitizer is potentially contaminated with methanol or 1-propanol?

A: Check your hand sanitizer products to see if they are on FDA's list of hand sanitizers consumers should not use, and stop using them immediately if they are. Continue checking this list often, as it is being updated regularly. Most hand sanitizers found to contain methanol or 1-propanol do not list it as an ingredient on the label (since they are not acceptable ingredients in the product), so it's important to check the FDA's list to see if the manufacturer or product is included. Visit FDA updates on hand sanitizers consumers should not use for more information.

Q. If people have been exposed to hand sanitizer with potential methanol or 1-propanol contamination, what should they do?

A: People who have been exposed to hand sanitizer containing methanol or 1-propanol and are experiencing symptoms should seek immediate medical treatment for potential reversal of toxic effects of methanol or 1-propanol poisoning. Young children who accidentally swallow these products and adolescents and adults who drink these products as an alcohol (ethanol) substitute are most at risk for methanol or 1-propanol poisoning.

The FDA encourages health care professionals, consumers and patients to report adverse events or quality problems experienced with the use of hand sanitizers to FDA's MedWatch Adverse Event Reporting program:

• Complete and submit the report online; or
• Download and complete the form, then submit it via fax at 1-800-FDA-0178.

Include as much information as you can about the product, including the product name, the manufacturer, and the lot number (if available).