

Hand sanitizers: Promoting safe use by children



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Because of the current COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is advised to wash their hands frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Effective handwashing means scrubbing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, then rinsing. This is especially important after bathroom use, before eating, after coughing, sneezing, or nose-blowing, and in settings where there is *Clostridium difficile* infection. In health care settings, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are recommended after touching surfaces and before entering and leaving a patient environment, providing that your hands are not visibly soiled.

Outside the health care setting, hand sanitizers can be used the same way, as well as after sneezing or coughing. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers should contain at least 60% alcohol. In Canada, these products are considered over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, and because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Canada has allowed several unregulated products on the Canadian market.

Poison control centres in the United States have seen a recent increase in accidental ingestion of hand sanitizer, so adults must take care when these products are within reach of young children and when being used by children.

Advice to parents:

- When using hand sanitizer on yourself or others, apply a dime-sized amount to dry hands. Rub hands together until completely dry.
- Keep hand sanitizers out of reach of pets and children. Young children, especially toddlers, may be attracted by the pleasant smell and the brightly coloured bottles.
- Young children should only use hand sanitizer with adult supervision.
- Make sure children do not put any hand sanitizer into their mouth. Ingesting even a small amount of hand sanitizer can cause alcohol poisoning in children.
- If you suspect your child has ingested hand sanitizer, call a Poison Control Centre immediately. Do not wait for symptoms to develop.
- Watch to ensure children do not rub their eyes when their hands are wet with sanitizer.
- You don't need to be concerned if your children eat with their hands or lick their hands after using hand sanitizer, as long as hands are dry.

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