

GUIDANCE FOR ALCOHOL-BASED HAND SANITIZERS

Presented by the Kentucky Alcohol Prevention Enhancement Specialist (PES)
New Vista Prevention Center | KYAlcoholPrevention.org



Although alcohol-based hand sanitizer has been a vital component in preventing the spread of infection during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that we educate youth on some potential dangers and take some precautions to protect their safety.

WHAT IS ALCOHOL-BASED HAND SANITIZER?

According to the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov), “Cleaning hands at key times with soap and water or hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol is one of the most important steps you can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to those around you.” Ethyl (ethanol) or isopropyl alcohol, are the active ingredients in most hand sanitizer products.

HOW TO USE ALCOHOL-BASED HAND SANITIZER

The [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) suggests using alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol when soap and water are not readily available to avoid spreading germs to others and getting sick. Hands should be free from dirt before applying.

- ❖ Use enough sanitizer to cover all surfaces on your hands.
- ❖ Rub your hands together until dry (20 seconds).
- ❖ Do not rinse or wipe off the sanitizer, allow to dry completely.

SUPERVISE CHILDREN USING HAND SANITIZERS

- Adults should supervise young children when using hand sanitizer, especially in schools and childcare facilities. ([NIH, 2012](https://www.nih.gov))
- Youth are more likely to swallow scented or brightly colored sanitizers.
- Older children and adults might swallow hand sanitizers to become intoxicated. ([NIH, 2012](https://www.nih.gov))
- Hand sanitizers are safe when used as directed, but could cause alcohol poisoning if swallowed. ([NIH, 2012](https://www.nih.gov))
- “The large volume [hand sanitizer] dispensers (500 mL) with over 60% ethanol contain the equivalent alcohol content of 2/3 of a standard size bottle (750 ml) of 120 proof distilled spirits.” ([NIH, 2012](https://www.nih.gov))
- Calls to the National Poison Data System related to hand sanitizer increased by 79% from March 2019 to March 2020. Most calls were unintentional exposures in children 5 years and under. ([FDA News Release, April 27, 2020](https://www.fda.gov))

ACUTE ETHANOL INTOXICATION

Acute ethanol intoxication can result in serious, even fatal effects, including hypothermia, central nervous system and respiratory depression, cardiac dysrhythmias or arrest, hypotension, nausea and vomiting, acute liver injury, myoglobinuria, lactic and ketoacidosis and hypoglycemia. (European Journal of Internal Medicine “Acute Alcohol Intoxication”, 2008)

FDA GUIDANCE ON DENATURED ALCOHOL IN HAND SANITIZER

- More than 1,500 additional hand sanitizer manufacturers entered the market to meet demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. ([Consumer Reports, July 28, 2020](https://www.consumerreports.org))
- Nearly half (700) of those manufacturers were alcohol distillers. ([Consumer Reports, July 28, 2020](https://www.consumerreports.org))
- In April, the FDA issued guidance for manufacturers to add denaturants to hand sanitizers to make the product less appealing to ingest, particularly for young children. ([FDA News Release, April 27, 2020](https://www.fda.gov))
- On July 29, 2020, the Kentucky Department of Education, released information from the FDA warning “...some alcohol based sanitizers produced in distilleries may smell like the drinking alcohol... Schools are encouraged to educate students on the dangers of ingesting alcohol-based hand sanitizer, either intentionally or by accident.”

FDA IDENTIFIES METHANOL-CONTAMINATED HAND SANITIZERS

The FDA expanded its list of sanitizers to avoid, as some are contaminated with methanol. Methanol can be toxic if absorbed through the skin and deadly if swallowed. ([FDA Updates, July 31, 2020](https://www.fda.gov) and [July 27, 2020](https://www.fda.gov))