

ALERT!

Hand Sanitizer



THERE IS an alarming new trend among teens looking for a quick and easy buzz: getting drunk off of hand sanitizer.

After several Los Angeles-area teens drank hand sanitizer and were treated for alcohol poisoning recently, the issue began receiving significant media attention. While not new, the behavior does seem to have become much more popular lately. There are numerous websites and online videos that glamorize the act; a few even go so far as to provide step by step instructions for how to do it. Some sites offer recipes to make drinks that are better tasting, others explain how to distill the alcohol content from the hand sanitizer.

Many hand sanitizers contain ethyl alcohol (also known as Ethanol, grain alcohol, or drinking alcohol) which is the same kind of alcohol found in “adult beverages”. Hand sanitizer contains a large amount of alcohol—the alcohol content can be as high as 70%—making a swallow of it similar to a swallow of hard liquor.

“A person who has never had alcohol before can get drunk instantaneously. It is very, very dangerous,” said Dr. Calvin Lowe, of Children’s Hospital of Los Angeles.

“All it takes is just a few swallows and you have a drunk teenager,” said

Cyrus Rangan, a medical toxicology consultant for Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. “There is no question that it is dangerous.”

Sanitizers that do not contain ethyl alcohol may contain chemicals or other forms of alcohol that could be even more dangerous to drink. Drinking a hand sanitizer that contains these ingredients has the potential to cause serious illness or even death.

The accidental ingestion of hand sanitizer by children is possibly even more of a threat than the risks involved with intentionally consuming it. Hand sanitizer typically comes packaged in clear, easily accessible plastic bottles that have no child safety features. It is often a bubbly, brightly colored gel that looks appealing to toddlers. It is estimated that each year there are thousands of cases nationwide of young kids drinking or licking hand sanitizer. Many of these kids end up in the emergency room. Because the alcohol content in hand sanitizers is so high, it takes only a very small amount to be toxic to small children. Adding to the danger is the fact that hand sanitizer is so commonplace that it is not thought of as a potential hazard. Many parents store it in places such as diaper bags or cabinets where it can be easily found by children.

Parents should restrict access to potentially harmful products like hand sanitizer. If parents do buy the product, it is recommended that they use a foam hand sanitizer, which is less likely to be ingested by a curious child. ☹

SOURCES

<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/apr/24/local/la-me-hand-sanitizer-20120424>

<http://www.chla.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=ipINKTOAJsG&b=7632571&ct=11675685¬oc=1>

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