

Hand Sanitizer – What you need to know

Overview

Hand hygiene refers to removing or killing microorganisms (germs) on the hands that have been picked up from contact with an infected person, contaminated surfaces or the environment. When performed correctly, hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases and infections. Hand hygiene is performed either by using soap and running warm water or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

The following guidelines have been developed to support the safe and effective use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer. The term hand sanitizer refers to alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

When to use hand sanitizer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use when soap and running water is not available.• When hands are NOT visibly dirty.• Upon entering and exiting a public place (e.g. mall, grocery store, playground).• After touching a multi-use shared object (e.g. elevator button, pin pad).
How to use hand sanitizer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depending on the size of your hands, the amount of hand sanitizer needed may vary.• Use enough product to cover hands and vigorously rub over hands until all surfaces are completely dry (about 20 seconds).• Do not rinse or wipe off the hand sanitizer before it is dry.• Always follow the label directions on hand sanitizer products.
Is hand sanitizer bad for skin?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hand sanitizer is generally well tolerated.• When used on healthy skin hand sanitizer should rarely cause skin problems.• To reduce the risk of skin irritation do not wash hand with soap and water immediately before or immediately after using hand sanitizer and do not put on gloves until hands are dry following the use of hand sanitizer.• For ongoing skin problems, speak with your doctor or work with your employer to determine if there are acceptable substitutes and appropriate lotions.
Is hand sanitizer a risk for ingestion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Due to its high alcohol content and high risk to alcohol toxicity (e.g., isopropyl), hand sanitizer can cause serious harm if ingested.• The risk of ingestion is greater for those who may not understand the warning labels and the negative effects of ingestion (e.g. children, cognitively-impaired individuals).

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those who support or assist at-risk populations should develop strategies to prevent ingestion such as supervising children when using hand sanitizer and placing in supervised and monitored areas.• If someone has ingested hand sanitizer, contact PADIS (Poison and Drug Information Service) at 1-800-332-1414 to speak with an information specialist. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Can hand sanitizer cause a fire?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hand sanitizer containing alcohol is considered a flammable liquid.• Although the incidence of fires related to hand sanitizer is very low, it is vital that it is stored safely and that bulk dispensers are installed and maintained correctly.• When providing hand sanitizer to the public, building operators and business owners should consult their local code inspector to discuss placement of hand sanitizer dispensers to ensure they are accessible but not in locations that would increase the chances of igniting or spreading a fire.• For example, do not place near light switches, overtop of electrical outlets, in direct sunlight or near heat sources.
Is hand sanitizer regulated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check whether a product and its claims have been authorized by Health Canada by searching the List of Hand Sanitizers Authorized by Health Canada.• To alleviate shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic, some hand sanitizers may not have a DIN or NPN on the label but are being permitted for sale as an interim measure. Check for these products by searching the List of Products Accepted under Interim Measure.• Report any adverse reactions to Health Canada by calling 1-866-234-2345.