



1-800-222-1222

Safe Hand Sanitizer Use in Schools FACT SHEET

Frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, especially during a flu outbreak. When soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers are commonly used. These products have a large margin of safety and are not expected to pose a hazard unless children ingest them in large quantities or if they are applied incorrectly.

Children should not be in possession of hand sanitizers brought from home for personal use until they are able to open and apply the sanitizer in a controlled manner and be trusted not to apply it to their lips, eyes, or inside their nose. In addition, they should be old enough to be trusted not to apply it to other children. Discourage children from sharing their personal use containers with other children. Hand sanitizers for personal use must be kept in their original, fully labeled containers.

Teachers can remind children that, whenever possible, washing with soap and water is always better; if soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers can be used. Teachers can also be a great resource for emphasizing the correct use of hand sanitizers:

- Apply a dime-sized amount to dry hands.
- Rub hands together until completely dry.

Most children who get a “taste” of hand sanitizer when eating something immediately after applying the product to their hands experience only a bad taste in their mouth. These children just need something to drink to remove the taste.

Eye pain can result if hand sanitizer is rubbed or squirted in the eye. Most eye exposures can be managed by copious flushing the eye with water and will not require the child to be sent home or to a physician.

Note: Most (but not all) hand sanitizers contain alcohol. The alcohol has been denatured to make it taste bad but this may not dissuade some children/adolescents from purposely drinking a hand sanitizer in order to “get a buzz” or “get drunk.” Teachers should be aware of this potential and be on the lookout for any abuse.

For exposures, schools can call the West Virginia Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Telephone lines are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by health care professionals trained in the prevention and management of poisoning exposures. This service is free and confidential.