



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

## SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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### Prevent Accidental Poisoning Caused by Cleaning Products and Hand Sanitizers

Cases of poisonings caused by products used to clean our homes and our hands have been on the rise during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past few months, poison control centres across Canada have seen a 58% increase in poisonings from disinfectants, cleaning products, bleaches, and hand sanitizers.<sup>1</sup>

SafeMedicationUse.ca received a report about a child who started to drink from a container that looked like a water bottle (see photo at right), thinking it was a drink. The bottle actually contained hand sanitizer. Fortunately, the child did not swallow the liquid, but she did feel burning in her mouth.



A recent [alert](#) by ISMP Canada shared concerns about hand sanitizers being packaged in bottles usually used for drinks, such as wine, liquor, soft drinks, and water. When liquid hand sanitizers are available in these containers, it increases the chances that someone might accidentally drink them.<sup>2</sup> This problem is less likely to occur with gel hand sanitizers.

#### Health Canada and SafeMedicationUse.ca share the following tips to help keep your family safe during the pandemic and beyond:

- Always read and follow the directions on product labels.
- Never mix cleaners, especially those that contain bleach.
- Store cleaners, bleaches, disinfectants, and sanitizers safely, out of the reach of children and pets.
- Transfer liquid (not gel) hand sanitizer that is packaged in a beverage bottle into an empty, clean, dry container (such as a spray bottle). Or replace the cap of the sanitizer bottle with a pump or spray top to make it look different from a drink container. Label the new sanitizer container and include the words "For external use only".
- In case of accidental poisoning, call your [local poison centre](#). Be ready to share information about the specific product causing the problem.

<sup>1</sup> Protect yourself and your family from poisonings: always read and follow the label directions when using hand sanitizers, disinfectants, household cleaning products and bleaches. Ottawa (ON): Health Canada; 2020 May 5 [cited 2020 May 8]. Available from: <https://healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2020/72983a-eng.php>

<sup>2</sup> Risk of poisoning from hand sanitizers sold in beverage containers [advisory]. Ottawa (ON): Health Canada. 2020 Jun 10 [cited 2020 Jun 15]. Available from: <https://healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2020/73291a-eng.php>

#### Medication safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts.

This newsletter was developed in collaboration with Best Medicines Coalition and Patients for Patient Safety Canada.

Recommendations are shared with healthcare providers, through the ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin, so that changes can be made together.

This newsletter shares information about safe medication practices, is noncommercial, and is therefore exempt from Canadian anti-spam legislation.