

Alcohol-based Hand Rub Product Ingestion Care Management

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If you have any questions or comments regarding this information, please contact the Infection Prevention & Control Hand Hygiene Program at: hand.hygiene@ahs.ca

Background

Alcohol-based hand rubs (ABHR) have become increasingly more accessible in public places like hospitals and other care settings, shopping malls and schools. ABHRs are effective for hand hygiene because they have a high concentration of ethanol or alcohol which acts as a skin disinfectant and are helpful in preventing the spread of microorganisms. However, ABHR can pose a risk to our patients, clients or residents and can result in harm, including death, if ingested.

Symptoms

Ethanol, whether it comes from ABHR or the liquor store, can cause similar signs and symptoms:

- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Slurred speech
- Low blood pressure
- Low blood sugar, especially in children
- Nausea and vomiting.

While it is unlikely that ethanol absorbed through intact skin, accidentally licked, or splashed in the eye is toxic, ABHR can be toxic when ingested. Symptoms for ABHR ingestion may appear more intense than with other drinkable alcohols, given the higher percentage of ethanol in ABHR.

The following is a comparison between ABHR and other types of ethanol ingested by humans:

Alcohol Product Examples	Concentration (Ethanol)
ABHR	70-80 per cent
Spirits	40 per cent
Wine	14 per cent
Beer	6 per cent

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What to do if a patient, client or resident ingests ABHR

1. Determine what happened

- How and when was the person exposed to the ABHR?
- Estimate the amount ingested, if possible.

2. Assess your client

- Vital signs, level of consciousness, blood glucose, weight.
- What health conditions does the person have?
- What medications is the person taking?
- Is the person dependent on or tolerant to alcohol?

3. Clearly identify the product

Secure product Safety Data Sheet, if possible.

4. Call PADIS (Poison & Drug Information Service) at 1-800-332-1414

Speak with an information specialist who can help determine the potential risk to the client and assist you in making an appropriate treatment plan. This service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. More information about PADIS can be found [online](#).



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