



OP06

Sanitizing to Death - A Case Series Study

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Objective

Mankind evolved facing numerous challenges. One such challenge we faced was the Global pandemic by COVID – 19 virus. As a definite treatment was not there, we strained our resources to prevent an infection. One such method advocated was sanitising hands intermittently. WHO and CDC recommended alcohol based preparation for that purpose. Ethyl and isopropyl was the chosen ingredient. Plethora of sanitizers was released in the market. But accidental and intentional intake by people followed either on belief that ethyl alcohol is consumable and some regarded it as a poison. Deaths were reported, autopsy and chemical analysis turned out surprising unexpected findings.

Case Reports

Three cases of death due to alleged consumption of sanitizer were brought for autopsy at Dept. of Forensic Medicine, Govt. Medical College, Thrissur. Two cases were brought dead to hospital. One person survived 24 hours and showed clinical features of methanol poisoning. All had complaints of blurring of vision. Autopsy of one person showed hardened and fixed stomach and small intestine. Chemical analysis report revealed methanol in all cases and in addition formaldehyde was reported in the latter case.

Doctors working in critical care ICU started developing hyperpigmentation and itching of their hands following frequent topical application of hand sanitizers, which was relieved after changing the product. We collected and sent previous and current sanitizer samples for chemical analysis. Chemical examiners report detected methanol in the former sample!

Conclusion

According to the Food and Drug administration (FDA), methanol is not a standard ingredient in sanitizers, as per regulations. But following the huge demand for sanitizers following the COVID-19 surge, some manufacturers started adding methanol instead of or in addition to the accepted alcohols, as the former is cheaper. Deaths following methanol poisoning following ingestion of sanitizers had been reported outside India too. Topical application of methanol containing sanitizers can also bring serious systemic side effects or even death. We doctors may become the major victims of the same as we are forced to apply it frequently especially in ICU's and wards, as a part of infection control policy.