

Hand sanitizer found to pose abuse risk



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BALTIMORE - Prison officials and poison control centers can add a new substance to their list of intoxicants — hand sanitizer. A usually calm 49-year-old prisoner prompted a call to the Maryland Poison Control Center after guards found him red-eyed, combative and "lecturing everyone about life." Other inmates and staff reported the unidentified prisoner had been drinking from a gallon container of hand sanitizer, which is more than 70 percent alcohol, or over 140 proof, the center's director wrote in an article appearing in the February issue of the [New England Journal of Medicine](#).

That call was one of about a half dozen the Maryland Poison Control Center has received involving hand sanitizers, said Dr. Suzanne Doyon, the poison center's director and co-author of the article. Doyon wrote the article along with Dr. Christopher Welsh, assistant professor in the University of Maryland School of Medicine, to raise awareness of the potential for abuse of hand sanitizers.

While the hand sanitizer contains other chemicals in smaller amounts, it is primarily the same type of alcohol found in liquor, and acts on the body in the same way, said Doyon.

"I don't think a lot of people realize these are ethanol containing, or alcohol containing. They are really no different than a really concentrated liquor," Doyon said.

However, other types of hand sanitizers contain isopropyl alcohol, which is metabolized differently by the body, and has different health effects, she said.

Alcohol-based sanitizers are credited with being more effective against germs and less irritating, but health-care providers and hospitals and correctional facility administrators should be aware of the potential misuse, the authors said in the article.

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