

With children, watch out for 'pretty poisons'

I have heard that hand sanitizers can be poisonous for young children. Is that true?

Most hand sanitizers work because they contain a significant amount of ethyl alcohol, so they do pose a risk of alcohol poisoning to children if enough is ingested. They are meant to be used only on hands, not internally. But kids may not understand that, and there have been cases where children have consumed enough alcohol from hand sanitizers to become intoxicated. All recovered completely, but any type of alcohol ingestion in children is risky.

While they are an effective tool against germs, hand sanitizers could be classified as a "pretty poison" — a poisonous substance that children might confuse as a consumable product, especially if they are scented so they smell good enough to eat. According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, about half of the 2 million poison exposures each year occur in children under the age of 6. The most common substances responsible for those exposures are cosmetics and personal care products (13.4 percent), cleaning substances (9.8 percent) and analgesics (8.2 percent).

Obviously, hand sanitizers aren't the only culprits. Disinfectants can look like juice or soda pop. Vitamins, antacids and pain relievers can look like mints, gum or candy. Moth balls can look like marshmallows. Glue sticks can look like lip balm.

This doesn't mean families with young children should never use any of these products. Rather, we simply need to be aware of the potential risks and take steps to keep children out of harm's way.

Guidance from health professionals and



poison control centers includes:

- Store items that pose a risk in their original containers, and store them out of reach. Even child-resistant containers aren't child-proof.

- Never call medicine "candy" or pretend you take medicine because it tastes good. Refrain from taking medicine in front of small children to limit the chance they'll copy your behavior.

- Signs of poisoning in children include an unusual, sudden onset of sleepiness; inability to follow you with their eyes; eyes going around in circles; burns or stains around the mouth; or strange bad breath.

- If you suspect poisoning and your child is still conscious, call the Poison Control Center at (800) 222-1222. This is a national toll-free number that will automatically connect you to a nearby regional center. (In Ohio, poison control centers are located in Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati.) If you are told to go to the emergency room, take the product with you. If your child is unconscious, call 911.

- Always have syrup of ipecac, a product that can force a person to vomit, in the house, but never use it unless instructed to do so by a poison control center or your doctor. With some poisons, vomiting can do more harm than good. And, as with any medicine, keep syrup of ipecac out of the reach of children.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION
OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

For the month of
July 2007

By Martha Filipic
(614) 292-9833
filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu

Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by family and consumer science educators Carol Chandler, with OSU Extension in Union County, and Kathy Dodrill, with OSU Extension in Washington County.

To receive Family Fundamentals electronically, sign up at our subscription Web site, <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~news/subscribe.php>. To get a PDF file e-mailed to you, contact Martha Filipic at filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.

Section of Communications and Technology News and Media Relations
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
(330) 263-3780

OSU Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all educational programs conducted by Ohio State University Extension are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, age, gender identity or expression, disability, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, or veteran status.