

Paris, 31 August 2020

Press release

Hand sanitiser: take care to protect young children from accidentally splashing their eyes

Several cases of young children accidentally spraying alcohol-based solutions into their eyes after using the hand-sanitiser dispensers provided in shops or other places open to the public have been reported by ophthalmologists and French Poison Control Centres. The most serious cases have required hospitalisation and even eye surgery. Here is some advice on how to avoid these accidents and limit their severity if they do occur.

Dispensers for alcohol-based gel or solution provided in shops or other places open to the public are often at young children's eye level. Because they are so easy to operate, for example with a foot pedal or automatically, they can be seen as a game. **More than 50 cases of splashes resulting in eye damage have been reported to Poison Control Centres.** The most common symptoms observed were eye redness or pain, inflammation of the eye or eyelid, burning of the eyelid or increased sensitivity to light. More severe cases have been characterised by damage to the cornea and required admission to hospital.

A nationwide survey of incidents involving hand sanitiser in places open to the public was carried out. Between 11 May and 24 August 2020, 63 cases presenting eye symptoms were recorded by Poison Control Centres, with the patients averaging 4 years of age. **Three-quarters of these accidental splashes were in a shop or shopping centre**, with the remaining cases occurring in restaurants, swimming pools, public gardens and theatres. One fifth of the children had to be taken to the emergency department for treatment. Two cases of corneal damage, reversible after symptomatic treatment, were also recorded. During the same period, over ten children had to be treated in different French ophthalmology units for severe eye damage that failed to heal. At least two of them required surgery under general anaesthetic.

To ensure safe use of the hand sanitiser provided in shops and other places open to the public, and prevent the risk of eye damage that can be serious, ANSES, together with the Poison Control Centres and the French Ophthalmological Society, is issuing the following recommendations to people accompanied by young children:

- **Do not allow young children to use or play with hand-sanitiser dispensers: there is a risk that the solution could be sprayed directly into the child's eye**

- The accompanying person should take the hand sanitiser in the palm of their hand and apply it to the child's hands
- **In the event of splashes in the eye, rinse the eye immediately for about fifteen minutes under gently running water** (from a sink tap, mineral water bottle, reusable water bottle, etc.). **Note that any delay in rinsing is very harmful and could cause severe damage**
- After rinsing, if the child experiences any sharp pain, take them to an ophthalmologist or call a Poison Control Centre for guidance. Because the hand sanitiser can have an "anaesthetic effect", the pain may subside after a few hours even though there is major eye damage.

The French Ministry of Solidarity and Health and ANSES emphasise that when hand washing is not possible, the use of hand sanitiser is an essential barrier measure to prevent the risk of contamination by COVID-19.

French Poison control centres: <http://www.centres-antipoison.net/>

Press liaison

ANSES: +33 (0)1 49 77 22 26 - presse@anses.fr

DGS: presse-dgs@sante.gouv.fr - Tel.: +33 (0)1 40 56 84 00