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Hand Gel, On the Rocks

Parents and officials concerned about high alcohol content of hand sanitizer

By [MATT BARTOSIK](#)

Updated 10:19 AM CDT, Tue, Sep 15, 2009



You don't have to be a parent to know that little kids' hands get into everything and are often covered with dirt and germs. But some officials are saying that using hand sanitizers could be more harmful than helpful.

With the recent outbreak of the swine flu, parents and teachers have become even more conscious about keeping little hands clean. Across the nation, schools have been making frequent use of hand-sanitizing gel.

But in order to be effective, that gel has to have an alcohol content of at least 60 percent. That's more than some cocktails!

According to the [Trib](#), some officials are worried about the alcohol's flammability and potential misuse as an intoxicant:

In [Kane County](#), students can't use hand sanitizers in school except under adult supervision. The county regional office of education requires school districts to have a formal plan for how they'll dispense the germ-fighting product in classrooms and lunchrooms, and they must store larger pump containers and extra bottles in fireproof cabinets or outdoor sheds like other flammable products.

In [DuPage County](#), the schools chief plans to discuss hand-sanitizing gels with the county's 42

district superintendents next week.

Adult supervision? Formal discussions? This reeks of overprotecting ... or does it? From glue to markers to aerosol cans, kids have been known to use all kinds of creative ways to get high.

And from the [New England Journal of Medicine](#): "The [Maryland Poison Center](#) was called about a 49-year-old ... prison inmate who was ... drinking from a gallon container of Purell hand sanitizer over the course of the evening. It was discovered that this sanitizer contains 62% ethanol by weight (more than 70% alcohol by volume). The inmate's blood alcohol level was found to be 335 mg per deciliter."

Holy cow! Sounds like that hand gel should come with a little paper umbrella.

And a fire extinguisher.

"It doesn't matter if you have an ounce of this or a one-gallon bottle, alcohol is a flammable liquid," [Cathy Stashak](#), a fire protection specialist with the [Office of the State Fire Marshal](#), told the [Tribune](#). "If there's an ignition source, it could catch on fire."

So kids are stuck with either germy or flammable hands?

"If [students] are monitored and they're taught how to use it properly, I think the benefit far outweighs the risk," said [Sheila Grogan](#), head of the DuPage County division of the [Illinois Association of School Nurses](#).

Still, officials remind parents and teachers that nothing beats good old-fashioned hand-washing.

And keeping your fingers out of your nose, of course.

[Matt Bartosik](#), a "between blogs" blogger, finds work for idle hands.

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First Published: Sep 14, 2009 10:37 AM CDT

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