



Non-beverage Alcohols

What Are They?

Non-beverage alcohols are toxic substances that contain alcohol but are not meant for human consumption. The only type of alcohol sold for drinking is ethyl alcohol. Any types of alcohol not sold for drinking are non-beverage alcohols. Examples of non-beverage alcohols include:

- Isopropyl alcohol (used in things like hand sanitizers, rubbing alcohol, cosmetics, cleaning products) and
- [Methyl alcohol](#) (used in things like industrial solvents, antifreeze, camping stoves).

Non-beverage alcohols are **not safe to consume** and can be life-threatening even in small amounts.

What Do They Look Like?

Non-beverage alcohols are typically a clear, colorless liquid with an alcohol odor. Non-beverage alcohols can be found in a variety of household and industrial products.

How Do They Work?

All alcohol, including non-beverage alcohols, are [depressants](#) – they slow down brain function and can affect your thinking, attention, judgement and reaction time. See the [alcohol page](#) for more information.

Why Are They Dangerous?

Methanol (methyl alcohol or wood alcohol) is a highly toxic form of alcohol that can cause severe health issues, including blindness and death.

Isopropanol (isopropyl alcohol) can cause alcohol poisoning if swallowed.

The type of alcohol that is in alcoholic beverages – **ethanol** (ethyl alcohol) – can also be found at high concentrations in non-beverage products like hand sanitizer. This can lead to alcohol poisoning if consumed.

What Does (Non-beverage) Alcohol Toxicity Look Like?

Isopropyl alcohol toxicity looks like beverage alcohol (ethanol) [toxicity \(overdose/poisoning\)](#). Signs and symptoms include:

- Blue, cold, clammy skin



- Vomiting
- Not moving, not waking up
- Slowed or no breathing
- Loss of bladder and bowel control

Methanol toxicity looks different than beverage alcohol (ethanol) toxicity, primarily due to its severe, delayed effects. While initial symptoms of methanol poisoning look like ethanol inebriation (being drunk), it leads to a severe metabolic acidosis. This can result in blindness, coma, and death.

Any alcohol toxicity is a **medical emergency**. Do not let someone “sleep it off.” Call **9-1-1** immediately, and place them in the [recovery position](#).

Safer Use Tips

- There is **no safe way to consume non-beverage alcohol!** If you choose to drink, only drink ethyl alcohol that is meant to be consumed by humans, and follow [safer partying tips](#).
- Consuming alcohol in hand sanitizers and other household products can be life-threatening. It is crucial to keep these products out of reach of children and to never ingest them. Contact a poison control centre or seek immediate medical help if you think someone has ingested any.
- Be aware that some non-beverage alcohols (especially rubbing alcohol) are extremely flammable and can ignite quickly when exposed to flame.

Need Help?

If somebody accidentally consumes alcohol that is not sold for drinking, contact [poison control](#) right away! Tell them what kind of alcohol was consumed, and how much – they’ll give you specific health care advice for the situation.

For non-urgent help, reach out to your [local health centre](#), community counsellor/mental health professional, or [call 811](#). For emergencies, please dial 911.

Visit [Getting Help](#) for more information.

There are national resources to help with drinking as well, offering peer-led support meetings or immediate assistance from groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Families for Addictions Recovery. They can be found at Health Canada’s [Substance Use Support Page](#).