



Safety Alert May 2020

Risk of burns when using ethanol-based hand sanitisers around open flames

Warning: Ethanol is a flammable liquid and there is a fire risk until it is *completely* dry!

Background

Ethanol-based hand sanitiser can be used to decontaminate the bacteria and viruses from your hands that can cause disease. The ethanol is usually diluted so that the ethanol content is at least 65-70%. This helps to slow the rate of evaporation of the ethanol and therefore increase the contact time with your skin, in order to decontaminate your hands effectively.

Warning: Ethanol is a flammable liquid. If your activity involves using or being around open flames and other ignition sources, the recommended method of decontaminating your hands is by washing your hands with soap and water, rather than using an ethanol-based sanitiser.



If your hands are still wet or damp with the ethanol-based sanitiser, you could be at risk of your hands catching fire. Even in a gel, the ethanol can burn, as demonstrated in this video [Burning Hand Sanitiser demonstration \(link\)](#)

What to do

If you need to sanitise your hands before involvement in activities involving open flames and ignition sources, wash your hands with soap and water, not ethanol-based hand sanitisers.

Activities that involve open flames and ignition sources include:

- flame-drying and warming glassware,
- using:
 - bunsen burners
 - small alcohol lamps
 - gas hotplates
 - kerosene primuses
 - matches, gas lighters and cigarette lighters
 - lighting gas or wood fires, stoves and BBQs



Further Information:

Contact your Faculty HSE Business Partner or Coordinator
<http://safety.unsw.edu.au/contacts>

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