

Summary of review of NRLS data for incidents related to alcohol handrub

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) collects and analyses reports of patient safety incidents received from NHS staff through the National Reporting and Learning System (NRLS).

Incident reporting enables the types and causes of patient safety issues to be identified so that practical solutions can be developed to prevent harm to patients.^{1,2}

In July 2008, a review of data from the NRLS was undertaken for the NPSA's clean~~your~~hands campaign to give an overview of some of the risks related to the use of alcohol handrub.

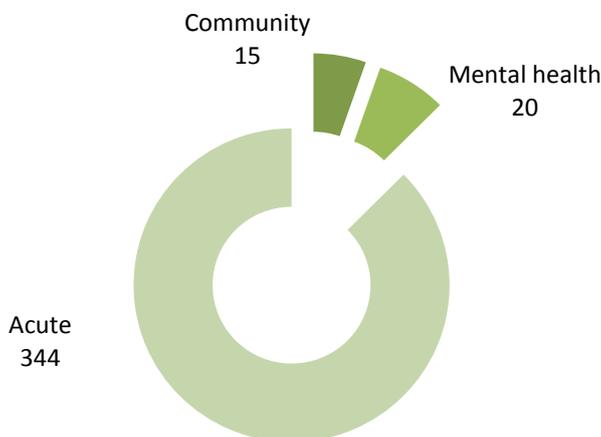
The system was searched for the terms 'alcohol' or 'sanitiser*' and 'handgel', 'gel', 'wash', 'handwash', 'scrub', 'handscrub', 'rub', 'handrub' or 'foam' from inception to 15 July 2008.

For more information on the NRLS data, please visit <http://www.npsa.nhs.uk/patientsafety/patient-safety-incident-data/quarterly-data-reports/>

1. Care setting of incident reports

A total of 692 incidents were identified, of which 379 were relevant.

Breakdown of the 379 relevant incidents by care setting



379

Total no. of incidents

2. Incidents in acute settings

Of the 344 incidents reported from the acute setting, 176 reported ingestion of alcohol handrub. Of these seven stated explicitly that the ingestion was in error. For example, one case reported that the patient mistook the alcohol handrub dispenser for a saccharin dispenser they use at home.

¹ National Patient Safety Agency, *Quarterly Data Summary Issue 6*. (October 2007) Available at:

² Institute of Medicine. *To Err is Human: Building a safer health system*. (2000).

There were 43 cases where ingestion was attempted and prevented by staff, or where it was not confirmed that the patient had ingested alcohol handrub. Five cases of inadvertent splashing into the mouth were reported.

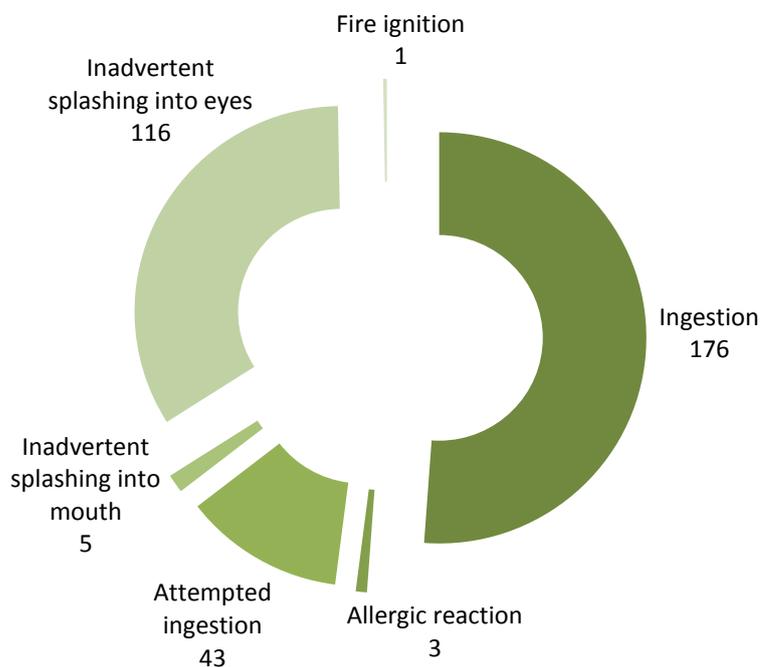
Three cases reported minor allergic reactions to the alcohol handrub.

116 cases of inadvertent splashing of the alcohol handrub into eyes were reported; in some cases this was into the eye of the user of the alcohol handrub but a significant number related to the eye of someone standing nearby and a high number of these were children.

One case was reported where a patient added alcohol handrub to a very small fire they had started.

Some of the incidents reported related to patients who have psychiatric problems and others who are detoxifying from alcohol.

Breakdown by type of incident in acute care settings



344

Total no. of incidents

2.1 Severity grading

Of these cases, one case of ingestion was reported as a death; however, it is difficult to know as fact whether this was the direct cause as the patient had been admitted earlier in the day having ingested a quantity of alcohol.

Two incidents were graded as severe; one of which related to a patient with severe psychiatric symptoms who had previously jumped out of a window and also taken a paracetamol overdose and then drank some alcohol handrub.

12 cases were graded a moderate harm but the vast majority of incidents were graded as no or low harm.

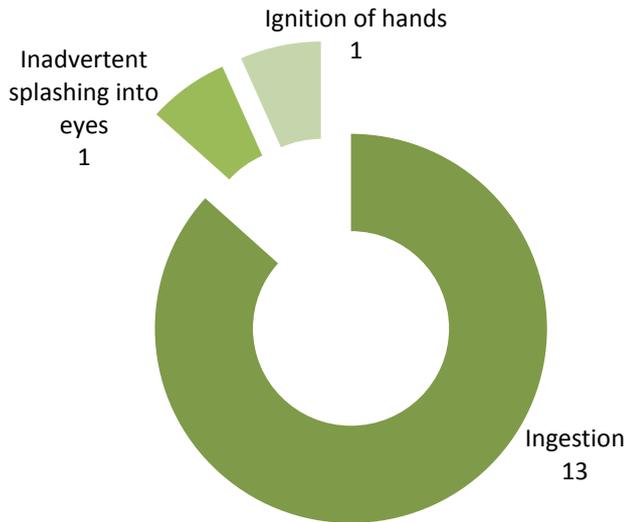
3. Incidents in mental health settings

Of the 15 incidents reported from mental health settings, 13 incidents were reported of ingestion or suspected ingestion, and all were reported as no harm incidents.

One incident was reported where the alcohol handrub had splashed into eyes; this was reported as low harm.

One incident was reported where the patient's hands ignited.

Breakdown by type of incident in mental health care settings



15
Total no. of incidents

4. Incidents in community settings

Of the 20 incidents reported in community settings, 12 incidents of actual or possible ingestion were reported; nine were reported as no harm, two as low harm and one as moderate harm.

Eight incidents of splashing into eyes were reported; four were reported as no harm and four as low harm.

Breakdown by type of incident in community settings



20
Total no. of incidents