

Stay safe: Prevent methanol poisoning

What is methanol?

Methanol (sometimes called 'wood alcohol') is a poisonous chemical that has no colour, smell or taste. Methanol can sometimes end up in alcoholic drinks. This is more likely in alcohol made at home or illegally. You cannot tell if a drink contains methanol just by looking at it, smelling it or tasting. **Methanol is not safe to drink.**

Methanol is also commonly found in industrial products such as solvents, fuels, antifreeze and some cleaning agents.

Why is methanol dangerous?

When you consume methanol, your body turns it into harmful substances that can cause:

- Blindness
- Organ failure
- Brain damage
- Death

How does methanol get into alcoholic drinks?

- **Accidental contamination:** A small amount of methanol is naturally produced when alcohol is made. It must be removed before the product is safe to drink. If alcohol is made incorrectly, then methanol may remain. This often happens when the first part of the distillation (the 'foreshots' or 'heads') is not removed. This part contains high levels of methanol.
 - Accidental contamination is more likely in alcohol made at home or illegally.
 - Spirits, especially fruit-based spirits, are at higher risk of accidental contamination.
- **Deliberate contamination:** Sometimes methanol is added to alcohol to increase its strength or volume. This is more common with illegally produced alcohol.

Signs and symptoms

Methanol poisoning can feel like a "hangover" that is worse than expected or getting worse over time. Symptoms can take 12–24 hours to show. If methanol is mixed with normal alcohol, symptoms may take longer to show.

Early symptoms	Late symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Dizziness • Nausea and vomiting • Abdominal pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blurred or reduced vision • Confusion or drowsiness • Difficulty breathing • In severe cases: seizures, coma, or death

What to do if you suspect methanol poisoning in yourself or others

1. Seek urgent medical attention. **Call 000** or go to the nearest Emergency Department.
2. Contact the **Poisons Information Centre** on **13 11 26** for advice.

How to reduce the risk of methanol poisoning

- Only drink alcohol from trusted, regulated sources.
- Avoid homemade or illegally produced spirits.
- Store chemicals safely and clearly label all containers. Never store chemicals in drink bottles.
- Keep hazardous substances out of reach of children.
- Follow safety instructions when handling industrial or household chemicals.
- Share this factsheet with family and friends.

Use the QR code to learn more about methanol poisoning at the Australian Government's Smartraveller website (<https://bit.ly/methanolpoisoning>).

