

News From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Spike in Poison Control Calls Related to Disinfectant Exposures

Calls to US poison control centers regarding exposures to cleaning products and disinfectants increased by more than 20% during the first quarter of 2020 compared with 2019, according to a CDC analysis [posted](#) online on April 20.

Since the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic began earlier this year, the CDC and other public health agencies have recommended proper cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces. The sharp uptick in calls about exposures to those products began in March 2020, the CDC and the American Association of Poison Control Centers surveillance team data show. During the first quarter of 2020, US poison control centers received 45 550 such calls compared with 37 822 calls in the first quarter of 2019.

Nearly two-thirds of this year's calls involved bleach exposure. Hand sanitizers and nonalcohol disinfectants were each involved in 36.7% of calls, but some involved mixing cleaning products. For example, a woman who heard a news account about cleaning groceries soaked her produce in bleach, vinegar, and hot water mixed together. After developing difficulty breathing, coughing, and wheezing, she received oxygen and bron-

chodilators at an emergency department and was released.

"To reduce improper use and prevent unnecessary chemical exposures, users should always read and follow directions on the label, only use water at room temperature for dilution (unless stated otherwise on the label), avoid mixing chemical products, wear eye and skin protection, ensure adequate ventilation, and store chemicals out of the reach of children," the authors wrote.

According to news reports, states including [Illinois](#), [New York](#), [Michigan](#), and [Maryland](#) reported spikes in calls to poison control lines after President Donald Trump asked whether disinfectants could be injected to treat coronavirus disease 2019 during an April 23 [press briefing](#). The comments led a disinfectant [maker](#) to warn against ingesting or injecting cleaning products.

Homeless Shelters Face High COVID-19 Risks

The CDC has recommended steps that homeless shelters should take to prevent severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) transmission after studying [outbreaks](#) at several facilities across the United States.

Among the US [shelters](#) that accommodate an estimated 1.4 million individuals



annually, recent CDC investigations have shown that transmission is prevalent at some facilities but may occur undetected in others.

In late March and early April, CDC teams responded to clusters of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases at 5 homeless shelters in 3 cities: Boston, San Francisco, and Seattle. Teams carried out SARS-CoV-2 testing at these shelters and others in Seattle and Atlanta. Results for 1192 residents and 313 staff at 19 shelters showed that at sites with 2 or more cases, between 17% and 66% of residents and between 16% and 30% of staff tested positive. At a Seattle shelter with 1 reported case, 5% of residents and 1% of staff tested positive, while 4% of residents and 2% of staff tested positive at 2 shelters in Atlanta with no previously reported cases.

"Homelessness poses multiple challenges that can exacerbate and amplify the spread of COVID-19," the investigators wrote. "Homeless shelters are often crowded, making social distancing difficult. Many persons experiencing homelessness are older or have underlying medical conditions," which increases their risk of severe disease.

To protect residents and staff, the CDC has [recommended](#) that shelters implement infection control practices, apply social distancing measures such as ensuring residents sleep 6 feet apart, and encourage residents and staff to wear masks. The CDC also has [advised](#) shelters to encourage residents to shelter in place, test staff and residents, and promptly isolate those who are symptomatic or test positive. — Bridget M. Kuehn

Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.

