

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on Methanol Poisonings & Treatment

**1. Why would people add methanol to alcoholic beverages?**

Methanol is often deliberately and illegally added to alcoholic beverages as a cheaper alternative to ethanol (normal alcohol that can be consumed) in countries where taxes on legitimate alcohol or the cost of legitimate alcohol might be perceived as too high.

**2. How are people usually poisoned from drinking adulterated alcohol?**

Methanol poisonings by direct consumption occur when unscrupulous enterprises or individuals add industrial methanol into legitimate alcoholic beverages. The poisonings can also be caused through improper brewing of homemade alcohol, which produces methanol instead of ethanol. This alcohol is either consumed directly or mixed in with legitimate spirits, again as a cheaper and/or more potent alternative to ethanol.

**3. Symptoms**

When methanol is ingested into the body, it is converted into formaldehyde and then into formic acid, which causes a person's blood to become acidic (metabolic acidosis). Methanol poisoning in its early stages might be difficult to distinguish from inebriation from normal ethanol consumption. Severe symptoms do not usually occur until 12-24 hours after consumption and can include: abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, breathing difficulty, blindness, blurred vision, seizures, and/or comas.

**4. How much consumption of methanol is fatal?**

Drinking just 25-90 mL (0.7-3.0 ounces) of methanol can be fatal without proper medical treatment. Since methanol is an industrial chemical, it should not be consumed in any quantity, just as people would normally not mix gasoline or other industrial chemicals into legitimate alcoholic beverages.

**5. How to treat methanol poisoning?**

Methanol poisoning can be treated successfully if diagnosed within 10-30 hours of ingestion.

If you suspect someone might have methanol poisoning, get them to a hospital which has dialysis equipment as soon as possible. Fomepizole is used to inhibit methanol metabolism and is highly effective, but might not be readily available in many markets. If Fomepizole is not available, begin to give the person high doses of ethanol (i.e., whisky, vodka, etc.) immediately. A person's liver will process ethanol first instead of methanol, delaying the onset of methanol poisoning and allowing for more time to process methanol out of a person's system. Administration of sodium bicarbonate can also neutralize formic acid and maintains proper pH balance. Ultimately, a patient may need to be put on dialysis to ensure the most comprehensive removal of methanol from his/her system.

**6. How to avoid methanol poisoning?**

Alcoholic beverages like canned beer, cider, wine, pre-mix, or duty free tend to be safer and less easy to adulterate. Purchase alcoholic beverages from trusted retailers, and avoid consuming mixed cocktails, homemade brews, and/or drinks priced far below those of normal/legitimate alcoholic beverages.

For more information, please visit the Health and Safety section of MI's website ([www.methanol.org](http://www.methanol.org)). You can also contact Dom LaVigne at MI (+65 6325 6302 / [dlavigne@methanol.org](mailto:dlavigne@methanol.org)).