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Hand sanitizer abusers looking for 'fix'

By CBC News
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People with substance abuse problems are turning to hand sanitizer in order to feed their addiction.

People with substance abuse problems are turning to hand sanitizer in order to feed their addiction.

"Everybody always prefers to be buying real alcohol over this but if we got nothing else then we'll drink it," a Regina woman named Loretta explained.

CBC News agreed not to use the last names of people who agreed to talk about consuming hand sanitizer.

"It bothers me," Loretta said about choosing that type of alcohol. "But I gotta get my fix somehow."

A spokeswoman for Regina police told CBC News that officers were encountering intoxicated people in Regina's downtown area "about one or two times a week."

Elizabeth Popowich said that in some cases the people were found with hand sanitizing liquids on them. In other cases they explained to officers that they had just consumed the liquid.

"It is becoming an epidemic," Loretta suggested. "You see the bottles all over the street everywhere you go."

Mixed with water

Loretta's boyfriend, Dallas, told CBC News that it is relatively easy to find the alcohol in public buildings or stores.

He said he mixes the liquid with water, and will consume an entire bottle to achieve a high.

"The whole bottle," he said. "I drink lots."

Dallas added the addiction takes its toll on everyone connected to the substance abuser.

"I don't like it," he said. "It just doesn't drag me down. It drags everybody else down with it."

Shawn Fraser, executive director of the downtown Carmichael Outreach Centre, says he has had to take hand cleaner away from people coming to the centre.

"People who are faced with the disease of alcoholism will find a way to drink," Fraser noted. "Hand sanitizer... seems to be what's going on now. But if not, people still find a way."

Popowich noted alcohol-based hand sanitizer is not a controlled substance and it would be difficult to prevent people from obtaining the product, as it is readily available.

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