

Lye water

Lye water is a caustic liquid used in cooking. It can cause serious corrosive burns to the throat, oesophagus and stomach if swallowed.

It is often sold in attractive bottles similar to soft drink containers, although it is in fact a poison. This poses a serious risk to children.

What is lye water and what is it used for?

Lye water is an ingredient used in Asian cooking such as making cakes, cooking noodles). It is usually added as part of the recipe in small amounts (table spoon volumes). The product has also been used in soap making and as a cleaning agent.

Why is there a health concern?

Lye water is a strongly alkaline (caustic) solution which can cause serious injury in the form of corrosive burns, especially to the throat, oesophagus and stomach if swallowed.

SA Health is aware of cases of ingestion of lye water that have occurred in Queensland and Victoria. These cases resulted in serious injury and hospitalisation of two children due to mouth, throat and stomach burns. There have been no cases reported in South Australia.

It has come to the attention of SA Health that lye water is available in some stores such as Asian groceries and markets in South Australia. Lye water is usually packaged in attractive bottles, similar to soft drink containers (see photo).

Lye water is in fact a poison, under the *Controlled Substances Act, 1984*. As such, it requires specific packaging and labelling.

Although warnings are printed on bottles of lye water, to date these have been found to be inadequate in terms of the requirements under the Act.

Another requirement of the Act is that strongly alkaline substances such as lye water must **not** be stored in a beverage container and must comply with retail requirements for Schedule 5 and 6 poisons.



What action has been taken by SA Health?

SA Health is taking a pro-active approach and advising the general public of the dangers of lye water by:

- issuing a press release, informing the public of the health risk of lye water if not used appropriately
- working with local Council Environmental Health Officers in the removal of lye water from sale
- working with the Office of Consumer & Business Affairs in warning the public, particularly ethnic groups of the hazard
- alerting national consumer and importation authorities
- advising other State, Territory & Commonwealth health authorities of the action being taken in SA.

Public Health Fact Sheet

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any health queries, please call SA Health's Scientific Services on 8226 7100.

Translation service

For information in languages other than English, call the Interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call the Department of Health.

This service is available at no cost to you; contact 8226 1990.

Contact

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