



Joint statement on the future of ethanol-based biocidal products in the European Union

Decision makers – act now to prevent a *de facto* ban on ethanol-based hand sanitisers, disinfectants, and antiseptics, for the sake of Europe’s health, economy, and public trust

4 November 2025

Ethanol is the essential ingredient in hand sanitisers, surface disinfectants, antiseptics, and many other biocidal products that keep us all safe. It is indispensable to public health, economic prosperity, and industrial resilience across the EU. No alternative substance matches its proven efficacy, safety, and availability.

More than 3.5 million cases of Healthcare Associated Infections (HAIs) are estimated to occur in the European Union and European Economic Area (EU/EEA) each year, leading to more than 90,000 deaths.¹ These are lives that could be saved or protected through effective hygiene and infection prevention. Ethanol-based biocidal products are a cornerstone of that protection. For the public, ethanol-based biocidal products provide a reliable first line of defence against common infections and viruses like flu and COVID², as well as to treat a range of fungi³.

Ethanol-based biocidal products are also essential for other healthcare settings, agriculture, food, hospitality, transport, cosmetics, and many other sectors. Removing them would put infection control, food safety, and whole sectors of the economy at risk.

Yet, regrettably, there is a real and serious risk that a *de facto* ban on ethanol-based biocidal products will be introduced in the EU. The European Chemicals Agency’s (ECHA) Biocidal Products Committee (BPC) is considering whether to recommend an EU-wide reclassification of ethanol in biocidal products as a Carcinogenic and Reproductive toxicant Category 1A (CMR) based on data that looks only at abuse and overconsumption of alcoholic beverages.

Relying on this data does not accurately reflect the use of biocidal products, during which exposure via dermal (skin) absorption or inhalation is negligible. Further, it also contradicts the established guidance and recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO)⁴, as well as advice from the European Commission⁵, European Centre for Disease Prevention⁶, and from international partners, including in the United States⁷.

¹ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Healthcare-associated infections, *European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control*, <<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/healthcare-associated-infections>> [accessed 17 October 2025].

² Kampf, G., ‘Efficacy of ethanol against viruses in hand disinfection’, *Journal of Hospital Infection*, 98.4 (2018), pp.331–338, doi:10.1016/j.jhin.2017.08.025.

³ Peters BM, Ward RM, Rane HS, Lee SA, Noverr MC., ‘Efficacy of ethanol against *Candida albicans* and *Staphylococcus aureus* polymicrobial biofilms’, *Antimicrob Agents Chemother*, 57.1 (2013), pp.74–82, doi:10.1128/AAC.01599-12.

⁴ World Health Organization, *WHO Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care* (World Health Organization, 2009), p.49.

⁵ European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission: EU Guidance for the progressive resumption of tourism services and for health protocols in hospitality establishments’, *Official Journal of the European Union*, (2020/C 169/01).

⁶ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), *Infection prevention and control and preparedness for COVID-19 in healthcare settings – Sixth update*, 9 February 2021, ECDC: Stockholm, (2021).

⁷ The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ‘Hand Sanitizer Facts’, CDC, 2024 <<https://www.cdc.gov/clean-hands/data-research/facts-stats/hand-sanitizer-facts.html>> [accessed 17 October 2025].



A reclassification of ethanol by the European Union under its Biocidal Products Regulation (BPR), following a recommendation by ECHA, would, in practice, lead to a *de facto* ban on ethanol-based biocidal products for the general public.⁸

Moreover, a reclassification would also severely restrict the availability and use of these products in professional settings across several sectors. Under the BPR, derogations and exemptions for professional use could be granted on a national, case-by-case basis only after a complex risk assessment process at Member State level. Even if granted, ethanol would in any case become a candidate for substitution⁹, and such exemptions would be time limited, after which the substance would need to be replaced. This would impose a significant bureaucratic burden and run directly counter to the European Commission's commitment to simplify regulation for citizens and industry. In addition, such restrictions would reduce production capacity across Europe, leaving Member States unprepared and unable to rely on sufficient supplies of disinfectants in the event of future pandemics or large-scale outbreaks.

It is evident that derogations are not the solution.

Therefore, we – the signatories, representing a broad base of would-be affected sectors from across the EU – urge the relevant national authorities in EU Member States and the European Commission to act now to prevent the CMR classification of ethanol in biocidal products.

Policymakers have both the opportunity and the responsibility to protect public health, preserve critical industrial operations, and uphold Europe's scientific credibility. The Analysis of Alternatives (AOA)¹⁰, submitted to the European Chemicals Agency as part of the public consultation process, has provided extensive, evidence-based input demonstrating that no other substance matches ethanol's proven efficacy, safety, and availability. Ignoring this collective expertise undermines the credibility of the AOA process itself.

Reclassifying ethanol would not only jeopardise infection prevention and public safety, but also disrupt European supply chains, weaken industrial competitiveness, and expose businesses and consumers to unnecessary risk. Disruption to the healthcare supply chain, for example, which plays a critical role in ensuring the delivery of essential medical products and services to patients, would lead to treatment delays, patient dissatisfaction, and increased costs.

Europe must ensure continued access to a substance that is safe, indispensable, and lifesaving. We welcome dialogue with policymakers to ensure that ethanol remains safe and available to all.

#HandsUpForEthanol

⁸ Regulation (EU) No 528/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 May 2012 concerning the making available on the market and use of biocidal products (Biocidal Products Regulation), Article 19 (4).

⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 10.

¹⁰ European Chemicals Agency, Previous consultations on potential candidates for substitution and on derogations conditions, European Chemicals Agency, 2025 <https://www.echa.europa.eu/web/guest/previous-candidates-for-substitution-and-derogations-conditions/-/substance-rev/79301/del/50/col/synonymDynamicField_1527/type/asc/pre/2/view> [accessed 17 October 2025]