



Methylisothiazolinone in household items - a growing (or well, killing) problem #germophobia

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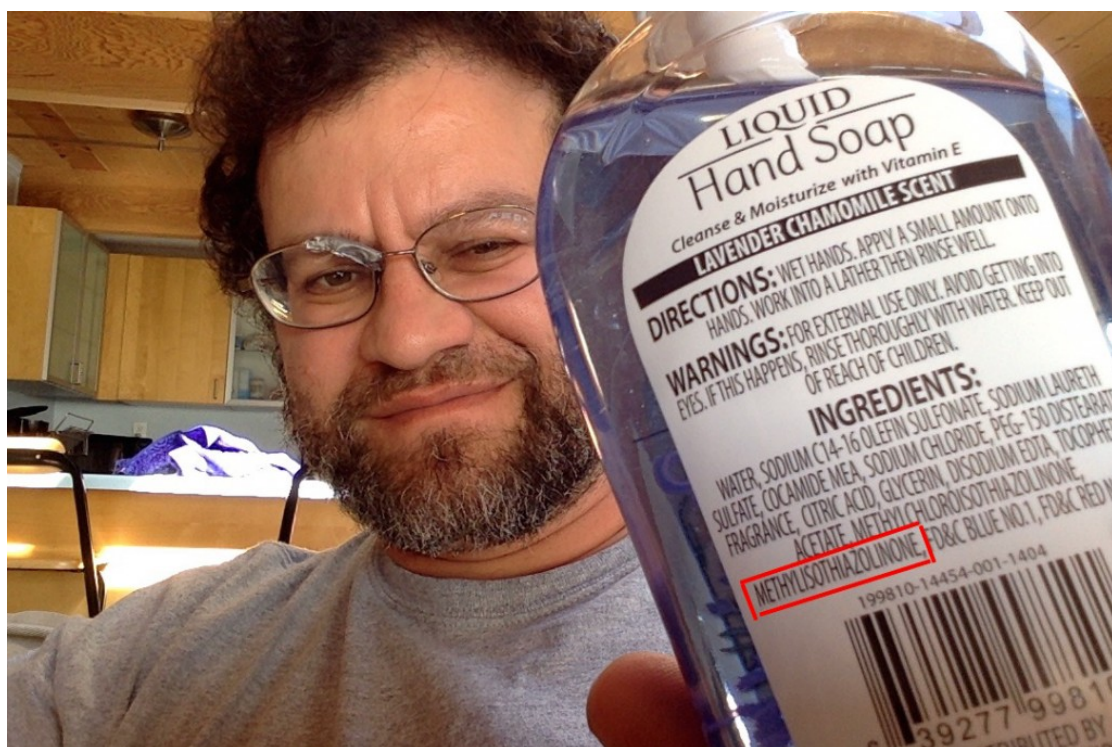
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Just got out to Bodega Bay with my family. I am teaching at the [Bodega Bay Phylogenetics course](#) tomorrow and we have made it an annual tradition to come out for a few days around the time when I teach at this course. This trip we rented a small house (3 days for the price of two – cheaper than a hotel ...). We just got here a few minutes ago and while I was looking up when my talk for the course was, my wife came over with a bottle of hand soap and asked “Is this the same chemical”? What she was referring to methylisothiazolinone. And lo and behold – check out the ingredients:



Now why on Earth would we care about this specific chemical? Well, because of something that started about a month and a half ago. One morning, my wife brought the business section of the Saturday New York Times over to me while I was working in our office and asked if I had seen the article on the front page.



The article was: [An Unexpected Reaction: Growing Scrutiny for an Allergy Trigger Used in Personal Care Products](#) by Rachel Abrams. I said *"I had seen the headline but not the article yet."* She said *"We should see if this chemical is in any of the things we use and if it might be contributing to the rash (our son) has been getting occasionally."* He had been having some issues for a year or so with unexplained rashes – and despite multiple doctor's trips – no solution.

So I read the article quickly. It discussed a chemical called methylisothiazolinone which, annoyingly, has been added to all sorts of personal care products relatively recently by a variety of companies. The chemical had apparently been causing rashes and allergies in lots of people.

So – the first thing my wife and I did was to go to the number one candidate culprit – the wipes he was using occasionally? Our son liked using wipes to clean his hands when we are out and about and also liked using them for, well, booty wiping, occasionally, again especially when we were out and about and the toilet paper at some bathroom was rough). So I looked at the wipes.



You got it.



And, well, I could not believe it. There on the list of “ingredients” in the wipes, was methylisothiazolinone. What the *\$##? Seriously? Could this be the cause of all the problems?

Well, so I decided to dig into this chemical a bit more. And well, I became extremely stressed and

pissed off at many companies out there. See for example these links:

- [Wikipedia Entry](#)
- [Baby Wipes](#)
- [Methylisothiazolinone: An Emergent Allergen in Common Pediatric Skin Care Products](#)

Jesus. Really Target what the heck were you doing putting this in baby wipes? So we stopped using those wipes. Threw them all away. And lo and behold my son's rashes completely went away. The best explanation I have is that the wipes were causing the rashes. I would bet anything it was the methylisothiazolinone though of course I don't have direct evidence that it is the culprit.

Nevertheless, given the articles I have read (including those above) we have been paying more attention to the ridiculous crap that some companies put in their skin care products. As an aside, we actually pay attention to almost all of the stuff we use around the house, these wipes just slipped through the cracks

Anyway – back to Bodega Bay. Thank goodness my wife pays attention to details. My kids had used the soap when we first got here a few minutes before she found it. But we got them to rinse a lot and hopefully it will not cause any problems. Nevertheless, I just am continually stunned by chemicals that companies put in products like soaps and lotions and other things. This is in a way connected to obsessive germophobia seen spreading around the world. Methylisothiazolinone is a "biocide" and is being used in these products as some way to keep them sterile and to have them be able to kill germs (and also as a marketing gimmick). But of course, we should not be trying to kill everything in the world around us. Doing that is a bad bad bad idea. I wonder – could the "allergic" skin reactions people are having to this methylisothiazolinone actually be due to it altering microbiomes and then that alteration leads to problems? I wonder. I won't test that idea on my kids or myself. But I do wonder.