

Letter to the Editor

A bitter sip: fuelling the fire in the lung

Sir,

The authors wish to highlight a critical public health warning prompted by a recent case we managed. A 3-year-old child was admitted with cough and respiratory distress following accidental ingestion of diesel (approximately 50 ml). The child played in the hot summer and was lured by the diesel stored in the fruit juice bottle kept in the home. The thirst during a hot summer and the familiar colour of the juice bottle made the kid accidentally drink the stored diesel.

At admission, the child was lethargic and looked sick. The child had increased breathing work with subcostal and intercostal retractions, and fast breathing was noted. This level of sickness highlights the severity of the ingestion and risk of severe aspiration pneumonitis. The investigations showed bilateral infiltrates in the chest X-ray and positive C-reactive protein (CRP). The child's condition improved after 48 hours of intensive respiratory support with non-invasive ventilation and antibiotics.

Chemical pneumonitis due to aspiration of diesel is unusual. Diesel, being a hydrocarbon, has a lipolytic effect on the surfactant and inflammation of the lung parenchyma.¹ Hence, caregivers must ensure that hazardous materials are only stored in their original containers, tightly sealed, and placed where children cannot see or reach them.² A moment's carelessness can lead to lifelong consequences or tragedy.

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Cite this article as: Tanigasalam V, Dinesh Kumar Narayanasamy, Moorthy SP, Jegannayagalu D. A bitter sip: fuelling the fire in the lung. *Int J Contemp Pediatr* 2025;12:1278.