Three Accidents Involving the Tasting of Chemicals

Three similar laboratory accidents involving the tasting of chemicals by students occurred during Science practical lessons. All the accidents occurred when group experiments for S.1 were conducted on the topic "Dissolving and Solubility". There were altogether four students from three schools tasting chemicals. The chemicals involved in two of the accidents were coincidentally potassium nitrate while the chemical in the third accident was copper(II) sulphate.

During the Science practical lessons when the accidents occurred, students were asked to observe the phenomenon of dissolving. Each group of students was provided with a small amount of chemicals to prepare solutions. In the accident involving copper(II) sulphate, no hazard warning labels were displayed on the vials containing small amount of copper(II) sulphate solids for group experiments. At the end of the practical lesson, the student involving in the accident informed the teacher that he had tasted the chemical during the experiment as he was curious about the taste of the chemical. In the accidents involving potassium nitrate, the students thought that the white solid, which was actually potassium nitrate, used in the experiment was similar to table salt. They were also curious about the taste of the chemical and thus tasted some of it. Teachers promptly helped the students to rinse their mouth with water and then gave them water to drink. All the students involved in the accidents were taken to the hospital for medical treatment. They were found to have no significant injury.

It was obvious that the accidents were due to the misbehaviour of the students. In order to minimize the occurrence of similar laboratory accidents in the future, teachers should note the following:

1. During experiments, students should be alerted repeatedly, if necessary, of the potential hazard when handling chemicals. Students should also be reminded repeatedly that eating or drinking are strictly forbidden in the laboratory unless such activities are essential to their studies and are permitted by their teachers.
2. Teachers should clearly inform students that group members should report any misbehaviour immediately to their teachers during experiments, especially those related to laboratory safety.