

Information Sheet

INHALANT ABUSE

For inhalant abusers, death may be only a breath away.

Deliberately concentrating and breathing fumes from chemicals in order to 'get high,' sometimes called *huffing*, *bagging*, or *sniffing*, may be a bigger problem than most parents or teachers realize.



According to The National Institute on Drug Abuse, over 2 million young people abused inhalants in 2004, and almost *one in every five 8th graders* has intentionally inhaled chemical products at least once. Inhalant abuse is the most prevalent form of drug abuse in 10-12 year olds.

What are the effects of inhalant abuse?

Sniffing can cause nausea, forgetfulness, confusion, and anxiety. Victims may lose control of their body, especially the use of their arms and legs. Their speech may be slurred. These effects can last up to an hour after sniffing. Sniffing may damage the kidneys, liver, heart, or brain...*permanently*. Sniffing can damage a user's unborn baby. Even worse: victims can die suddenly with no warning. "Sudden Sniffing Death" can occur the first, 10th, or 100th time a victim uses an inhalant.

What products are abused?

More than 1,000 useful and legal everyday products may be abused as an inhalant. Most common are *glues, solvents, paints, paint thinners, butane, gasoline, cleaning products, and products that come in aerosol cans including compressed air*. Because these products are relatively inexpensive and easy to get, many kids may not realize how dangerous they are.

The key to inhalant abuse is education.

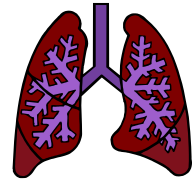
It is never too early to talk to your children about inhalants.

The same child who would not smoke a cigarette, drink alcohol, or take drugs may wrongly believe that 'sniffing' is harmless. Kids may also start abusing inhalants because of peer pressure or low self-esteem. Abusing inhalants can be addictive, and inhalants are often a "gateway" drug, leading to other illicit drug abuse.



GUIDELINES FOR TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT INHALANTS

When children are under age 10, talk about how our bodies need oxygen to live, grow, and be healthy. Use the word “poison” when talking about chemicals that can make you sick if you use them unsafely or in an unsafe amount. Enforce rules that require adult supervision every time a chemical product is used. Be a good role model: always read labels, follow directions, and provide accurate ventilation when using chemical products.



As children move into their teen years, talk about the negative effects of abusing drugs and other poisons. Discuss how the brain can be permanently damaged when deprived of oxygen. Share your concern about the dangers of sniffing. Talk with your teen about peer pressure. If you think your teen needs help, offer access to a counselor or other qualified professional.

How can you tell if a young person is abusing inhalants?

If someone is sniffing inhalants, some or all of these symptoms may be evident:

- Chemical odor on breath or clothing
- Drunk, dazed, or dizzy appearance
- Slurred speech or uncoordinated movement
- Paint or other stains where they normally aren't, such as the face, fingers, clothes
- Red or runny eyes or nose
- Sores around the mouth
- Nausea, vomiting, or loss of appetite
- Constantly smelling sleeves or other cloth item (pony-tail holder, sock, etc.)
- Always sitting with a pen or marker near face
- Has empty containers of products hidden in room, closet, or other place
- Keeps clothing or rags stained with paint or products stashed in room



For more information about inhalant abuse:

National Inhalant Prevention Coalition
322A Thompson St.
Chattanooga, TN 37405
1-800-269-4237
<http://www.inhalants.org/nipaw.htm>