

## Inhalants

March contains Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week. Inhalants are chemicals found in certain household and workplace products that produce chemical vapors. These vapors can be inhaled to induce mind-altering effects. Inhaled substances are rapidly absorbed into the brain to produce a quick high. Inhalants are convenient, inexpensive, easy to hide and legal. As harmless as it might seem, the risks are real — and potentially lethal.

### What are inhalants?

More than 1,000 products are used as inhalants. Many of them ordinary household goods, including: nail polish remover; household cleaners; deodorants; cooking spray; correction fluid; glue; rubber cement; paint thinner; butane lighter fluid; shoe polish; spray paint; markers; gasoline; and aerosol whipped cream.

Some slang terms for inhalants are: poppers; snappers; kick; bang; sniff; and whippets.

### What does it mean to huff an inhalant?

Huffing is sometimes used as a generic term for any type of inhalant use. But there are various ways to use inhalants, including:

- **Huffing.** To huff an inhalant, a rag is soaked in an inhalant and pressed to the mouth.
- **Sniffing or snorting.** Fumes are sniffed or snorted directly from an aerosol container or sprayed onto a heated surface and sniffed.
- **Bagging.** Fumes are sprayed or poured into a plastic or paper bag, which is placed over the mouth, nose or head. This method increases the risk of suffocating.
- **Spraying.** The aerosol is sprayed directly into the nose or mouth.
- **Inhaling.** Metal bulbs used to propel whipped cream from a can ("whippets") are pierced so that the nitrous oxide can escape into a balloon, from which it is inhaled.

Huffing causes a sense of euphoria that lasts about 15 to 45 minutes. The high can be prolonged by continued use. Inhalants provide a cheap and accessible alternative to alcohol or marijuana.

### What are the risks of using inhalants?

In addition to the initial euphoria, inhaling household products might also cause: dizziness; headache; slurred speech; painful skin rash; loss of coordination, inhibition and control; hostility; apathy; hallucinations and delusions; suffocation; seizures; loss of consciousness; a rapid, irregular heartbeat that can trigger lethal heart failure — even for first-time inhalers; and even death.

Chronic inhalant use can cause: liver damage; kidney damage; nerve damage; permanent brain damage; hearing loss; and coordination problems. Some damage may be irreversible. People who use inhalants are also at greater risk of depression, suicidal thoughts, conduct disorders and future drug use.

### **What are the warning signs of inhalant use?**

Inhalant use can be hard to detect. Look for these warning signs:

- Hidden rags, clothes, bags, gauze or empty containers of products that could be abused
- Chemical odors on breath or clothing
- Paint or other stains on face, hands or clothing
- Slurred or incoherent speech
- Appearing drunk or dazed
- Nausea or loss of appetite
- A rash around the mouth that extends to the middle of the face (glue-sniffer's rash)
- Lack of coordination and attentiveness, irritability, depression
- Red eyes or a runny nose

### **Who Uses Inhalants?**

The peak age of inhalant abuse is age 14 to 15. However, abuse is seen in children as young as 5 to 6 years of age. In many cases, abuse declines by 17 to 19 years of age. However, abuse can continue into adulthood. Inhalant abuse is more common in males than females.

Higher rates of inhalant abuse have been reported in those with a history of physical or sexual abuse, delinquency, criminal behavior, depression, suicidal behavior, antisocial attitudes, family conflict, violence, and/or drug abuse. Rates are also higher in people of

lower income, the mentally ill, those living in rural communities and those in communities with high unemployment rates.

**What's the best way to prevent inhalant use?**

To prevent inhalant use, talk about it openly. Be aware of what your child is doing and stay involved in his or her life. Discuss the risks. Honest discussion can help prevent a tragedy. Talk about what products can be abused and slang terms for inhalants. Emphasize that inhalants are deadly chemicals — not a harmless way to get high.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.drugfreeadamscounty.org](http://www.drugfreeadamscounty.org).