

Criminal Justice Practitioners

What You Can Do About Inhalant Abuse

Adults Only

Educate yourself about the problem.

Inhalants are common household, school, and office products used as drugs to get “high”. They are inhaled by youth as “drugs,” but in reality are poisons. Inhalant users are at risk for suffocation, accidents, burns and Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome (cardiac and/or respiratory arrest). Using inhalants also can cause damage to the nervous system, lungs, liver, and kidneys. Most youth are unaware of the dangers of inhalant abuse and need to be educated. It is equally important that parents are educated about the hazards of inhalant use so that they can monitor their children.

Knowing what to look for.

Abusable products (usually gas or solvent based) can be found everywhere. They include correction fluid, air freshener, gasoline, glue, dry erase and permanent markers, and any product packaged in an aerosol can. Substances that are *smoked* (such as tobacco, marijuana, or crack cocaine) or *snorted* (such as cocaine) are *not* considered inhalants.

Examples of inhalant paraphernalia: aerosol cans, paper and plastic bags, rags, and soda cans.

Examples of inhaled gasses: propane (used for barbecues), butane (lighters and lighter refills), nitrous oxide (from tanks and whipped cream containers), halogenated hydrocarbons (from air conditioners) and any other propellant from an aerosol can (Gasses may be inhaled from tanks or aerosol cans. They are sometimes transferred to plastic bags or balloons and inhaled.)

Slang terms for inhalant abuse: sprayers, spray, sprayheads, huffing, sniffing, and bagging.

Don't tolerate any experimentation.

Even first time inhalant abuse can be fatal. Studies show that one-third of the deaths from inhalant abuse were among first-time users. Seek an alcohol and drug assessment and take appropriate action.

Make sure youth are getting the message about the dangers of inhalant abuse.

The main prevention message is that inhalants are poisons and are dangerous like other poisons. Take care to avoid dismissing inhalant use as harmless experimentation. Emphasize what the dangers are, not what products may be abused or how they may be abused.

Inhalant intoxication signs.

- initial euphoria followed by central nervous system depression
- poor judgment, lack of coordination, disinhibition
- visual/aural hallucinations often occur

Inhalant users who have been surprised, scared, or chased are at increased risk for heart arrhythmias and fatal heart attacks (known as Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome). Chronic users may be underweight, display rashes around their mouth and nose, have hand tremors and problems with memory and thinking.

Be aware of who is using.

More than one out of every ten Maine students in grades six through twelve have tried inhalants according to the 2008 Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey (MYDAUS) results. It is a problem in all parts of Maine and among all types of children. Use may start as early as the third grade and generally increases through middle school, peaking in grades 8 and 9. Inhalants are used in groups or while alone. Also older teens and adults sometimes use inhalants with alcohol and other drugs.

Understanding the law around inhalants.

The inhalation of vapors, fumes and gasses from common, legal products, such as household, school, and office products to get “high” is illegal in Maine. It is also illegal to possess inhalants with the intent to inhale their vapors, fumes or gases. (Maine Title 22, Statute 2383-C). For more information on the laws visit,

<http://janus.state.me.us/legis/statutes/22/title22sec2383-C.html>

Maine Inhalant Abuse Prevention Work Group

A Project of the New England Institute of Addiction Studies / Funded by the Maine Office of Substance Abuse

For more information about inhalants please contact

Maine Office of Substance Abuse Information and Resource Center

Phone: 1-800-499-0027 TTY – 1-800-606-0215

Email: osa.ircosa@maine.gov Web Address: <http://maineosa.org/irc>

Drug Testing and Assessments.

If you suspect or know of inhalant, alcohol, or other drug use, a substance abuse assessment should be performed by a local substance abuse clinic. (Contact the Maine Office of Substance Abuse at 1-800-499-0027 to find a community outpatient clinic in your area.) Even if it turns out the tests prove a false alarm, your actions send a clear message about substance abuse. In instances where urine tests for drugs are being used, specific tests can be ordered for some specific inhalants.

If you are suspicious about a child's behavior or appearance, be sure to follow up.

Ask them about inhalants and be specific about why you are suspicious. Don't dismiss your gut feeling telling you that something is not right. REMEMBER, ONE OF THE ATTRACTIONS OF INHALANTS IS THAT ADULTS ARE NOT SUSPICIOUS OF IT AND DON'T RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF USE. If you have concerns or questions you can follow-up with the Northern New England Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

If you suspect a youth is in crisis because of inhalant intoxication, experts recommend taking these steps:

- Remain calm and supportive because scaring or agitating the person may increase the risk of Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome (cardiac and/or respiratory arrest).
- See that he or she gets fresh air.
- Lay the person on his or her side to prevent aspiration of vomit.
- Call an ambulance.
- Minimize distractions and try to keep the person from moving.
- Stay with the person until he or she receives medical attention.

For more information: Contact the Maine Office of Substance Abuse using the contact information below or contact the Northern New England Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

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