

Frequently Asked Questions

Inhalant Information for the Press and Other Professionals

WHAT ARE INHALANTS AND HOW ARE THEY ABUSED?

Inhalant abuse is the intentional concentrating and breathing in of gases and vapors with the goal of intoxication or “getting high.” Items abused include common household products such as fuels, solvents, gases, and products in aerosol cans. There are more than 1,000 household, shop, office, and industrial products that qualify as inhalants.

Most inhalants are central nervous system depressants, like alcohol, but unlike alcohol they are not meant to be put inside the body. The effects are quick acting (within seconds) and usually of short duration (15 to 45 minutes). Inhalants are poisons to your body and can cause death in even first time use.

WHY DO PEOPLE ABUSE INHALANTS?

Reasons why youth may be attracted to inhalants include:

- Teens believe that because many adults don’t know about inhalants, use is more likely to go undetected.
- Inhalants are inexpensive or free and readily available.
- Products used as inhalants are legal for their intended purposes. Youth mistakenly believe that inhalant abuse is legal. This is not true. Maine Law, Title 22, Section 2383-C makes it illegal to intentionally or knowingly possess or use inhalants for the purpose of causing intoxication.
- Many children and teens do not understand the serious dangers of inhalant abuse.

WHO IS LIKELY TO INHALE THESE SUBSTANCES?

Children may begin using inhalants as early as the third grade. In Maine, use peaks in eighth and ninth grade. Historically, the highest rates of use were reported among white youth and young people who lived in rural areas. Use tends to decline in high school and into young adulthood. However, inhalant abuse does exist among all age groups, genders, and races.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Inhalant abuse can cause sudden death by heart arrhythmia (Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome), suffocation, burns, or explosions. Long-term effects include damage to the brain, nervous system, liver, kidney, and bone marrow and can lead to birth defects. Users are at risk for both physical and psychological dependence.

IS INHALANT ABUSE ILLEGAL IN MAINE?

Maine Law, Title 22, Section 2383-C makes it illegal to intentionally or knowingly possess or use inhalants for the purpose of causing intoxication. Penalties can include fines from \$100-\$500, and/or judge-ordered evaluation, education or treatment with a licensed social worker or licensed substance abuse counselor or work to benefit the State. For a copy visit:

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

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF INHALANT USE?

The following signs and symptoms can indicate that someone may have abused inhalants: mood swings, irritability, anger, agitation, sleepiness, uncontrolled laughter, nausea, loss of appetite,

vomiting, hallucinations, convulsions, facial rashes and blisters, constant sniffing and coughing, dilated pupils, and bad breath. The presence of bags, rags, and empty product containers may also suggest inhalant abuse. If parents or youth-serving professionals suspect inhalant abuse, they can contact the Northern New England Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

WHAT ARE SOME PREVENTION TIPS FOR PARENTS?

Parents should understand the dangers of inhalants and can be instrumental in communicating these dangers to their children. The following suggestions may help guide parents:

- Prevent inhalant abuse in the home by becoming familiar with which household products are toxic, replacing certain substances with water-based solvents, and locking or monitoring toxic products that are stored in the house.
- Supervise the use of inhalable products.
- Initiate conversations with children—they will listen. Remember to emphasize that inhalants are poisons, toxins pollutants, and fire hazards - NOT drugs. Avoid referring to specific inhalant products and drug-like effects as this may spark curiosity.
- Prepare children for peer pressure. Parents and youth can practice how to positively deal with a risky situation.
- Urge youth serving professionals in your child’s life (teachers, coaches, and youth workers) to ensure that youth environments are free of poisons that can be used as inhalants.

WHAT IS THE IMMEDIATE TREATMENT FOR INHALANT EMERGENCIES?

If a person is found using inhalants, it is important to seek immediate emergency medical assistance (911 or other emergency medical numbers). While waiting for help, move the affected person to their side, allowing them to get fresh air, and be alert for vomiting. It is also important to not chase or scare the user as this can contribute to sudden sniffing death. Keep the atmosphere calm.

WHAT CAN THE MEDIA DO TO HELP?

The public may not understand the special nature of inhalant abuse. The media has an important role in raising the public’s awareness of this problem. The media can help by:

- Avoid printing lists or pictures of specific inhalants or how they are inhaled. This can stimulate curiosity about inhalants and lead to abuse. Emphasize fact-based information and scientific evidence. Exaggerated statistics and images are often easily dismissed.
- Stress the danger of inhalant abuse and steps people can take to prevent it. Help people connect with community resources by printing or announcing resource lists.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

The Maine Inhalant Abuse Prevention Task Force provides information, fact sheets and statistics on inhalant abuse at the Maine Office of Substance Abuse Information and Resource Center. (Email: osa.ircosa@maine.gov)

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

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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

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