

Your Teen & Inhalants

What do Parents need to know?



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more
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Paul R. LePage, Governor Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

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Call the Northern New England Poison Center for information and advice at 1-800-222-1222.

2013 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, gr 7 – 8, gr 9 – 12
http://www.drugabuse.gov/NIDA_Notes/NNVol15N6/tearoff.html
Partnership for Drug-free America, Partnership Attitude Tracking Study [PATS] 2007
1: http://teens.drugabuse.gov/facts/facts_inhale2.php

2: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS), 1999-2009. National Admissions to Substance Abuse Treatment Services*, DASIS Series: S-56, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 11-4646, Rockville, MD; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2011.

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In Maine, an average of

8.6% of high school students, grades 9 - 12, have abused inhalants at least once.

Abuse starts early – 8.3% of students in grades 7-8 said they had abused inhalants.



What is inhalant abuse?

Inhalant abuse is when a teen deliberately sniffs fumes, vapors or gases from any of the more than 1,000 common products found in the home, office, school and workshop for the purpose of getting high. Inhalants are central nervous system depressants like alcohol, but the initial effects of inhalants are much faster, more intense and last a shorter period of time. Examples include gasoline, rubber cement, paint thinners, degreasers, lighters, correction fluids, permanent and dry erase markers, nail polish, nail polish remover, pressurized air from whipped cream and computer air duster cans. These products are chemicals, toxins and poisons!

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How Serious Is Inhalant Abuse?

Inhalant abuse is an often overlooked form of substance abuse that is extremely dangerous. The most serious hazard for inhalant abusers is a syndrome called “sudden sniffing death.” It can happen anytime to anyone. If someone is abusing inhalants, their heartbeat can become irregular, stop beating and cause death. It can happen within minutes and can strike an otherwise healthy young person.

inhalant abuse can cause death in other ways too - asphyxiation, suffocation, or choking. Inhalant use has also led to reckless behavior, accidents, fires and explosions which can cause death and serious injury. Immediate effects can include: dizziness, nausea, headache, confusion, slurred speech, tremors, stumbling, irritability, and passing out.

Repeated use of inhalants causes serious damage to the nervous system and other vital organs which can be permanent. The toxic chemicals damage parts of the brain that control learning, movement, vision, and hearing.

Some individuals, particularly those who abuse inhalants heavily and for a long time, report a strong need to continue using inhalants. Compulsive use and a mild withdrawal syndrome can occur. Additionally, recent animal research has shown that toluene (a solvent used in many products that are abused) increases dopamine activity in the reward areas of the brain. The long-term disruption of the dopamine system is one of the key factors leading to addiction.¹

One-tenth (0.1) of a percent of all people who receive treatment say inhalants are the main substance of abuse. It is not very common, but repeated use of inhalants can cause addiction.²

Over one third of the people who reported inhalant use were adolescents aged 12 to 17.²

What can I do as a parent?

- Take advantage of “teachable moments” when you use products. Read labels out loud, follow directions and use products in plenty of fresh air. Demonstrate using products safely, explaining to your children how to keep products from getting into their bodies. Talk about the dangers of poisons and fumes.
- Avoid buying solvent-based products. Substitute water-based products and non-aerosol packaging. When you must use solvent-based products and fuels, keep them locked up and properly dispose of hazardous products you don’t use.
- If your child talks about inhalants as drugs, emphasize the fact that inhalants are really poisons, pollutants and fire hazards. If your child doesn’t know about the drug-like effects of inhalants don’t bring it up.

For more information on preventing inhalant abuse as well as signs, symptoms and effects, take a 15 minute FREE online training at: www.inhalantabusetraining.org

Note: Inhalant abuse does not include asthma inhalers, things that are smoked like cigarettes or marijuana, or strong smelling bleach or ammonia cleaners.

What about **helium in balloons...**
or **scented markers?**

Are those inhalants?

No, helium is NOT considered an inhalant because it is an inert gas that does not cause intoxication. BUT most people do not know that helium can be dangerous, even fatal. The pressure of the helium coming out of a helium tank can cause a person’s lungs to burst. Even the pressure from a balloon can cause a bubble of helium to go into a person’s bloodstream, causing a dangerous, painful condition called the “bends.”

Fruit-scented markers are usually NOT considered inhalants if they are water-based. BUT fruit-scented markers unintentionally teach children a risky behavior – sniffing an unknown substance into their bodies.

Parents can affect their children’s decisions. We need to teach children not to put poisons in their bodies – in any way: by swallowing, by inhaling or through the skin.

The first prevention message you give your child should be: “Be careful about what goes into your body.”

