

INHALANT ABUSE

The Foundation for a Drug-Free World reports that “20% of American adolescents – 1 out of every 5 – will experiment with inhalants by the eighth grade.”

What is Inhalant Abuse? Inhalant abuse, more commonly called huffing, is a type of substance abuse that involves breathing in (inhaling) fumes from household products for the purpose of “getting high”. Sniffing, bagging and/or chroming are also slang terms used in reference to the inhaling of chemicals to get high.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), there are four general categories of inhalants:

- **Volatile solvents** – Liquids that vaporize at room temperature.
 - These include paint thinners and removers, nail polish remover, cleaning fluids, glues, correction fluids and felt-tip marker fluids.
- **Aerosols** – Sprays that contain propellants and solvents.
 - Such as spray paints, deodorant and hair sprays.
- **Gases** – Medical anesthetics and liquid petroleum gases
 - Included in this category are ether, chloroform, halothane and nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”) and then gases found in butane lighters, propane tanks and whipped cream dispensers.
- **Nitrites** – Includes amyl nitrite, butyl nitrite and cyclohexyl nitrite, often called poppers.
 - Poppers are often packaged in small bottles like the energy shot products and sold as air fresheners, liquid incense, room deodorizers, cosmetics solvents, nail polish removers.

Why Do Youth Abuse Inhalants?

There are many reasons why youth inhalants appeal to youth.

- Readily Available and Easily Accessible
- Low Cost
- Escape Reality
- Mental Health
- Curiosity
- Peer Pressure etc.

What Youth Use to Huff

Inhalant paraphernalia used in huffing and/or inhalant abuse includes any item used to inhale chemicals to produce a high.

The following items are often used:

- Plastic Bags or Paper Bags
- Bandanas or Scarves
- Other Clothing

- Cotton Balls or Cotton Swabs
- Cloth Diapers or towels
- Soda Cans
- Balloons
- Cardboard boxes
- Aerosol cans

Inhalant Abuse is Deadly

Inhalant abuse has been trending down and was at an all-time low and holding steady for the last two or three years, yet youth inhalant abuse is still arguably the most damaging substance of abuse because it can cause immediate, irreversible brain damage and/or death. Huffing can cause severe brain damage or death to occur in a multitude of ways:

- Suffocation: This occurs when a youth's face is covered by the plastic bag and they are unconscious or too intoxicated to get it off
- Choking: When a youth passes out and vomits, choking on their vomit while unconscious
- Lack of oxygen: When a small enclosed space is filled with fumes that take up oxygen space or when lungs are filled with fumes rather than oxygen
- Explosion of combustible substances
- Cardiac arrest caused by caustic fumes
- Allergies to the chemicals
- Accidents under the influence

Warning Signs of Inhalant Abuse in Teens:

Some of the signs and symptoms of youth inhalant abuse are:

- Strong chemical odors in the youth's room, clothes, skin, or on their breath
- Finding empty aerosol cans, solvent containers, or inhalant paraphernalia in garbage and/or bedroom
- Chemical or paint stains on clothes, hands, or face
- Redness, rashes, or sores around the mouth or nose
- Bloodshot eyes or runny nose
- Difficulty speaking and/or slurred speech
- Vomiting, nausea, lack of appetite, weight loss
- Confused behavior, dizziness, or a dazed look

What are the Short-Term and Long-Term Effects of Inhalant Abuse?

While death is the most alarming side effect of inhalant abuse, there are also other short-term and long-term effects of inhalant abuse.

- Short-term effects include:
 - Slurred or incoherent speech
 - Impaired balance and coordination
 - Hallucinations/Delusions
 - Confusion/Impaired judgment

- Aggression/Hostility
- Loss of consciousness
- Long-term effects include:
 - Long-lasting Disorientation/Confusion
 - Depression
 - Memory loss
 - Lowered IQ
 - Cognitive loss
 - Hearing problems
 - Blood disorders
 - Coma

What Parents/Caregivers Can Do to Prevent Inhalant Abuse:

- The first step in preventing inhalant abuse in youth is to learn about it and educate yourself. The more aware parents are, the better prepared they will be to prevent and/or intervene.
- Secondly, parents should also talk to their kids about the dangers of inhalant use, making it clear that these substances are poisonous and can and have caused serious brain damage and death in youth.
- Furthermore, parents can limit access at home to commonly huffed products by locking up products in a cabinet, closet and/or supply room.

If you are concerned that your child is using/abusing inhalants, seek help. Click on the link below from Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services (NDHHS) for more information about finding substance use help in Nebraska.

<https://www.findhelp.org/nebraska-department-of-health-%26-human-services--omaha-ne-youth-mobile-crisis-response-%28ymcr%29/5655256296587264?postal=68101>

For additional information about youth Inhalant abuse. you can go to <https://nida.nih.gov/>, <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline> or <https://scipnebraska.com/>.

Sites used in this article:

https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_3095/ShortReport-3095.html

<https://www.teensavers.com/post/the-dangers-of-huffing-what-every-parent-should-know-about-inhalants>

<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/inhalants>