



Dangers of Inhaling Helium 20th Annual National Inhalants & Poisons Awareness Week March 18-24, 2012

Inhalant abuse is dangerous and can cause death. Huffing, as it is called, is not safe and adults must stop encouraging children to do it.

This past February, a 14-year-old girl from Eagle Point, Oregon, died from huffing helium. Ashley Long told her parents she was going to a slumber party down the street from where they lived, but instead she and several of her friends rode to a condo in another city. There, the older sister of one of the friends was having a party with alcohol and marijuana. Everyone at the party was also inhaling helium to make their voices sound funny. Ashley was encouraged by others at the party to take her turn when the tank got passed to her, telling her it would be okay and that it wouldn't hurt her.

However, Ashley passed out and later died at a hospital. The cause of death was an obstruction in a blood vessel caused by inhaling helium from a pressurized tank.

Death from inhaling helium is rare, but the practice is common at parties. Unknowing adults often demonstrate to kids at parties or in science classes how the gas affects vocal cords. Helium and other substances can displace the oxygen in the lungs which leads to oxygen deprivation. This can cause symptoms ranging from dizziness to blacking out, to cardiac arrest. Helium is also commonly seen in suicide kits. Mail-order hoods are sold in Oregon and elsewhere. The hoods are attached to a tank of helium by people wishing to kill themselves.

Other gases and solvents youth huff to get high that are also very dangerous include:

- ether,
- nitrous oxide,
- butane lighters,
- propane gas,
- air conditioning coolants,
- gasoline,
- car polish,
- paint/stain,
- aerosol cans containing whipped cream, fabric protector, cooking sprays, and air freshener.
- glue,
- felt tip markers
- correction fluid
- rubber cement
- household cleansers
- paint thinner
- dry cleaning fluids
- nail polish remover

Some reasons kids use inhalants:

- Inexpensive, available and legal
- Socially, to party
- Intoxicating effects
- Perceived as harmless
- Curiosity
- Stress and anxiety
- Peer pressure, to fit in
- To cope with pressures to succeed

Physical symptoms and other signs of inhalant use are:

- Unusual breath odor or chemical odor on clothing
- Slurred or disoriented speech
- Drunk, dazed or dizzy appearance
- Red or funny eyes or nose
- Spots and/or sores around the mouth
- Nausea and/or loss of appetite
- Sitting with a pen or marker near the nose
- Constantly smelling clothing sleeves
- Showing paint or stain marks on face, fingers or clothing
- Hiding rags, clothes or empty containers
- Chemical-soaked rags, bags or socks
- Missing household items
- Withdrawn or personality changes
- Deterioration of school performance

Street names or slang terms for inhalants:

- Air blast
- Amys
- Bagging
- Bang
- Bolt
- Bullet
- Buzz bomb
- Climax
- Glading
- Gluey
- Head cleaner
- High ball
- Hippie crack
- Honey oil huff/huffing
- Laughing gas
- Moon gas
- Oz
- Pearls
- Poor man's pot
- Poppers
- Rush
- Snappers
- Sniff
- Toilet water
- Whippets

The first defense against this practice is for parents to tell their kids about these dangers. Kids also need to ask themselves whether going along with the crowd at a party is worth it. Peer pressure can be very powerful.