

# Information You Need on Inhalant Abuse

## National Poisons and Inhalant Awareness Week

The Monitoring the Future study for 2004 reports that 17.3% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students throughout the country have reported using inhalants at some time in their lives. The week of March 20-26 is National Poisons and Inhalants Awareness Week (NIPAW). This week is set aside to learn about the dangers of abuse and to talk with your children about the dangers.

## What Inhalant Abuse Is

Inhalants are gases, fumes, or vapors that a person breathes in to get high. Breathing inhalants is often referred to as huffing, bagging or sniffing. Inhalants are common household items that are usually safe to use as directed. However, danger arises when these items are used in ways other than directed. When people talk about drug abuse, the first thoughts are usually tobacco and alcohol. However, inhalant abuse is one of the first substances abused because inhalants are usually taken from the home. If they don't get the products from home, they are inexpensive and can be bought at the local store.

## Dangers of Inhalants

Huffing is not a safe activity. There are many serious and dangerous side effects. Abusing **inhalants can kill** a person instantly whether it is the first time huffing or the hundredth. Death from inhalant use is usually caused when there is a high concentration of fumes. The high levels create a lack of oxygen in the lungs and the central nervous system causing breathing to stop. Inhalants can cause damage to the body as well. **Brain cells die** when the brain is deprived of oxygen. **Memory loss** occurs and areas of the **brain responsible for learning are damaged**, and often the damage can't be repaired. A user's **kidneys or liver may shut down** and **hearing loss** may occur in users as a result of inhaling. Some users may experience **spasms in their limbs** or suffer **bone marrow damage**.

## Signs of Abuse

As with other substances which are abused, there are signs and symptoms to inhalant abuse. A user will usually show more than one symptom, and chronic users will show more symptoms over a longer period of time. Below are a few signs to look for:

Avoids contact with family	Seems tired a lot	Becomes irresponsible
Disregard/change in appearance	Drop in school/grades	Feels ill often
Sores/blisters around nose/mouth	Appears "Spaced Out"	Becomes very moody
Unusual odors on clothes/breath	Red eyes	Runny nose
Missing household items	Irritable	Appears drunk/dizzy

March is a time set aside to learn about the dangers of inhalant abuse. Learn more at the National Institute on Drug Abuse ([www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)) or The Partnership for a Drug-Free America ([www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)). The more you know the better you are prepared to talk with your kids.

Information provided by Family Service & Community Mental Health Center – Prevention Department  
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