



Prevent Poisoning: Tips from the Blue Ridge Poison Center

INHALANTS

DANGER MAY BE ONLY A BREATH AWAY.

Deliberately concentrating and breathing fumes from chemicals in order to 'get high,' sometimes called *huffing*, *bagging*, or *sniffing*, is more dangerous than many people realize. Inhalant abuse can be harmful to the brain and body. It can also lead to death—even on the first try.



Thousands of household products could be abused as an inhalant. Most common are glues, solvents, paints, fuel, cleaning products, and products that come in aerosol cans including compressed air. Studies show that inhalant abuse is more common among children and pre-teens than among older teens or adults.¹ This may be because children do not realize that, when abused, these products are just as harmful as alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. It may also be because people of any age can easily buy or have these products without arousing suspicion.

WHAT DO INHALANTS DO TO THE BODY?

Inhaling concentrated fumes can cause an immediate feeling of euphoria which wears off quickly. This may leave the abuser craving more. Addiction to inhalants is possible and difficult to treat.

Inhalant abusers may also experience the following:

- Nausea
- Forgetfulness
- Confusion and anxiety
- Headache
- Hallucinations
- Tremors
- Difficulty moving
- Slurred speech
- Dizziness
- Unconsciousness ("passing out")



Long term inhalant abuse can cause sores around the mouth and nose, and permanent damage to the brain, muscles, and other organs. Long term inhalant abuse is linked to depression, other substance abuse, and suicide.

Inhaling concentrated fumes can also cause the heart to abruptly stop beating. This **sudden sniffing death syndrome** can happen the first, 10th, or 100th time someone abuses an inhalant. No one is safe.

¹Johnston, L. D., et. al. (2019). Monitoring the Future national survey results on drug use 1975-2018: Overview, key findings on adolescent drug use. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

SIGNS THAT SOMEONE MAY BE ABUSING INHALANTS:



- Chemical odor on breath or clothing.
- Drunk, dazed, or dizzy appearance.
- Slurred speech or uncoordinated movement.
- Stains around the face, fingers, or clothes.
- Red or runny eyes or nose.
- Sores around the mouth.
- Nausea, vomiting, or loss of appetite.
- Problems in school or problems with friends.
- Moody, secretive behavior.
- A change in personal hygiene.
- Has containers of products stashed in room, backpack, or other place.

PREVENTION: ADVICE FOR PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, AND TEACHERS

By 8th grade, 8.7% of students report having tried inhalants at least once.¹ It is important to talk to children early about inhalant abuse. Key messages include:

- Household chemical products like paint, glue, and cleaning supplies are POISONS. They can harm us if used in the wrong way.
- The brain and body need oxygen. When deprived of oxygen for even a few moments, damage can happen.
- Inhaling concentrated fumes can cause the heart to stop beating, whether it's the first, tenth, or hundredth time.
- Be a good role model. Always read labels, follow directions, and provide good ventilation when using chemical products.
- Keep track of inhalants in the home. Notice if any products are being used up too soon, are missing, or are found in unusual places.



CAUTION: When someone is under the influence of an inhalant, sudden stress or fear could cause dangerous changes in heart rhythm. Stay calm —and keep the user calm —while you call for help.

For help with any suspected poisoning or overdose.
1-800-222-1222 or www.poisonhelp.org.
Fast, free, private.



The **Blue Ridge Poison Center** at the University of Virginia Health System has been proudly serving Virginia since 1978. Visit our website for flyers, poisoning prevention news, tips, and more: **www.brpc.virginia.edu**. Please share this flyer!