

## A PARENT'S INHALANT PRIMER

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The Partnership for a Drug-Free America reports that an alarming number of teenagers are "sniffing" or "huffing" a variety of household products to get high. This "new generation" of inhalant abusers suffers from "generational forgetting." Today's middle school students were not exposed to the public education campaigns and community efforts of the 1990's that helped stop the abuse of inhalants.

Along with this, parents are not aware or are in denial about the prevalence of inhalant abuse. Only 5% of parents believe their child has ever abused inhalants; teens are four times more likely to report inhalant abuse than parents think. And there is a decreasing perception of risk, which correlates to the increase in use.

### What are the facts?

- One in five teenagers (20%), or 4.7 million teenagers nationally, report abusing inhalants in their lifetime
- 64% of teenagers in 2005 agree strongly that inhalants can kill you, down 19% from 2001
- 77% of teenagers in 2005 agree strongly that inhalants can cause brain damage, down 9% from 2001
- Kids from white, well-off families are more likely to abuse inhalants than poorer kids or those from other ethnic groups. (Reported by CNN on March 16)
- 34% of 12-17 year olds who tried inhalants for the first time came from families whose income was 200-399% over the federal poverty level; 33% came from families with incomes 400% or more over the poverty level.

### How do inhalants work?

- Upon inhalation, the body becomes starved for oxygen, forcing the heart to beat more rapidly in an attempt to increase blood flow to the brain. The user initially experiences stimulation, a loss of inhibition, and a distorted perception of reality and spatial relations. After a few minutes, the senses become depressed, and a sense of lethargy arises as the body attempts to stabilize blood flow to the brain, usually referred to as a "head rush." Users can become intoxicated several times over a few hours because of a chemical's short-acting, rapid-onset effect.

### What are the dangers?

- The most serious danger is from "sudden sniffing death," which can result from a single session of inhalant use. Highly concentrated amounts of vapors to get high can directly induce heart failure and death within minutes. Death can also result from the product coating the lungs and thus suffocating the user.
- Use also causes deterioration of the brain function including permanent brain damage, loss of muscle control, and destruction of the heart, blood, kidney, liver and bone marrow.

### What are the substances? A variety of more than a thousand household and commercial products, including:

- Glue, shoe polish, toluene, gasoline, lighter fluid, nitrous oxide, spray paint, computer duster, cooking spray, correction fluid, nail polish remover, marking pens, paint thinner, air conditioning coolants
- Volatile solvents, commercial adhesives, lighter fluids, cleaning solvents, and paint products

### What are the ways to ingest inhalants?

- Inhaling directly from containers for products such as rubber cement or correction fluid, sniffing fumes from plastic bags held over the mouth and nose, sniffing a cloth saturated with the substance, or from a balloon filled with nitrous oxide. Some volatile substances also release intoxicating vapors when heated.

### What are the symptoms? The effects resemble alcohol inebriation, lasting 15-45 minutes and include:

- Sweating, rapid pulse, hand tremors, insomnia, nausea, vomiting, physical agitation, anxiety, hallucinations, headaches, slurred speech, loss of coordination, wheezing, and grand mal seizures.
- Other symptoms can include: belligerence, apathy, impaired judgment, impaired functioning in work or social situations, dizziness, drowsiness, depressed reflexes, general muscle weakness, and stupor.
- Spots and/or sores around the mouth and nose, paint or stains on the clothing, red or runny eyes and nose, chemical odor on the breath

### What are some slang terms for inhalants?

- Moon gas, snappers, whippets, bagging, climax, gluey, hippie blast, snorting, rush, bolt, buzz bomb, poor man's pot, honey oil, thrust, quicksilver, glading boppers

### What can I do?

- Become educated on the serious nature of inhalant abuse, be alert for symptoms, talk with your child and teen, and consider seeking professional help if you suspect there is a problem. (Sources: Office of National Drug Control Policy, Join Together, National Inhalant Prevention Coalition)