

Police: Inhalants

Inhalants are common household and workplace substances that are sniffed or huffed to give the user an immediate head rush or high. They include a diverse group of chemicals that are found in consumer products such as aerosols plastic cement, fingernail polish remover, lighter fluid, hair spray, insecticides and cleaning solvents.

Who uses them?

According to a recent survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, inhalant use among all grades has risen steadily since 1991. Nearly 20 percent of all adolescents report using inhalants at least once in their lives. Current use is highest among eighth graders.

When inhalant use continues over a period of time, a user will probably develop a tolerance. This means that the user will need more frequent use and greater amounts of a substance to achieve the effect desired. This, in turn, leaves a user at much greater risk of suffering from possible negative effects of the drug, such as liver, lung, and kidney impairment, brain damage, nervous system damage, and even death.

Physical dependence can also result, and when a user tries to give up the inhalant habit, withdrawal symptoms such as hallucinations, headaches, chills, delirium tremors, and stomach cramps may occur.

EFFECTS OF USING INHALANTS

Using inhalants even one time can put you at risk for:

Sudden death, presumable from cardiac arrest.

Suffocation---typically seen with inhalant users who use bags.

Asphyxia---solvent gases can significantly limit available oxygen in the air, causing breathing to stop.

Visual hallucinations and severe mood swings

Numbness and tingling of the hands and feet

Prolonged use can result in:

Headache, muscle weakness, abdominal pain

Decrease of loss of sense of smell

Nausea and nosebleeds

Hepatitis

Violent behavior

Irregular heartbeat

Liver, lung, and kidney impairment

Brain damage

MORE ABOUT INHALANTS

Inhalants are a chemically diverse group of psychoactive substances composed of organic solvents and volatile substances commonly found in adhesives, lighter fluids, cleaning fluids and paint products. Their easy accessibility, low cost and ease of concealment make inhalants, for many, one of the first substances abused. While not regulated under the CSA, a few states place restrictions on the sale of these products to minors. Studies have shown that between 5 and 15 percent of young people in the United States have tried inhalants, although the vast majority of these youngsters do not become chronic abusers. Inhalants may be sniffed directly from an open container or "huffed" from a rag soaked in the substance and held to the face. Alternatively, the open container or soaked rag can be placed in a bag where the vapors can concentrate before being inhaled. Although inhalant abusers may prefer one particular substance because of odor or taste, a variety of substances may be used because of their similar effects, availability and cost. Once inhaled, the extensive capillary surface of the lungs allows rapid absorption of the substance and blood levels peak rapidly. Entry into the brain is so fast that the effects of inhalation can resemble the intensity of effects produced by intravenous injection or other psychoactive drugs. The effects of inhalant intoxication resemble those of alcohol inebriation, with stimulation and loss of inhibition followed by depression at high doses. Users report distortion in perceptions of time and space. Many users experience headache, nausea or vomiting, slurred speech, loss of motor coordination and wheezing. A characteristic "glue sniffer's rash" around the nose and mouth may be seen. An odor of paint or solvents on clothes, skin and breath is sometimes a sign of inhalant abuse. The chronic use of inhalants has been associated with a number of serious health problems. Glue and paint thinner sniffing in particular produce kidney abnormalities, while the solvents, toluene and trichloroethylene, cause liver toxicity. Memory impairment, attention deficits and diminished non-verbal intelligence have been associated

with the abuse of inhalants. Deaths resulting from heart failure, asphyxiation or aspiration have occurred as well.