

Contacts

For more information contact 1300 368 186

Family Drug Support
PO Box 226
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Phone (02) 9798 0001
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www.fds.org.au

Other Services

- **Limited counselling and family therapy**
- **Family support groups**
- **Bereavement contact**
- **Drug education kits**
- **Referral to drug and alcohol treatment**
- **Rehabilitation programs**



Inhalants

WARNING! - THIS FACT SHEET IS FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS AND IS NOT SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN

History of the drug

Inhalant sniffing is the common term for people becoming affected from breathing in the fumes from various solvents or gases.

Inhalant use is also known as glue sniffing, volatile substance or solvent abuse. Products used for 'sniffing' include: glues, aerosols, liquid paper thinners, toluene, butane gas (lighter refills), nitrous oxide and petrol.

Glues and aerosol can contents are commonly sprayed into a small plastic bag. The bag is then held over the mouth and nose and the contents inhaled. Others are inhaled directly from their containers or soaked onto a piece of cloth. Sometimes substances are sprayed directly into the nose or mouth - an extremely dangerous practice which can paralyse the airways, freeze the throat and cause suffocation.

Solvents are Central Nervous System depressants (like alcohol) and act in similar way to alcohol. However, because they are inhaled and go directly into the bloodstream, solvents act much more quickly than alcohol.

The initial effects, within 2-5 minutes of using, are feelings of excitement and relaxation. Repeated sniffing sustains these feelings. Loss of coordination also occurs. Some users become disoriented and frightened, and some experience side effects such as blackouts and mild hallucinations.

Only a small number of young people try solvents, and for most of those the practice is experimental and social - done to fit in with a group or for 'kicks'. Solvents are a cheap and easy to obtain alternative to alcohol for many younger people. This behaviour usually passes fairly quickly.

A small number of users go on to become 'long term' or 'dependent' users of inhalants. Generally speaking - this category of users have more problems in their lives, and less support and ability to deal with those problems. They may sniff alone or with other users, and are likely to also be using a variety of other drugs and alcohol.

Dangers

The dangers of inhalants depend on many different factors...including who is using and why, what substances are being inhaled, how and where. Some substances are less harmful than others.

A rare occurrence with substances such as correcting fluids, butane gas and aerosol sprays is 'sudden sniffing death', where a user's heart can be caused to beat irregularly. These deaths are often associated with stress during or soon after sniffing, and sniffers should never be chased or frightened.

The main danger in inhalants comes from accidents arising from being 'high' and losing inhibitions and judgement. Incidents such as falling, being run over, suffocation from plastic bags, and reckless behaviour are common.

Short term use of most products rarely leads to serious damage to the body. Some users have been admitted to hospital with convulsions, or unable to control their movements or speak properly. Most of these symptoms clear within a few hours. Others experience problems with airways and breathing - however this improves over time.

Long term or heavy use of inhalants can lead to more damage as the substances build up in the body. Permanent damage to the brain, liver and kidneys has been reported in heavy long term users.

What can you do?

Practical advice for sniffers or potential sniffers includes such things as:

- Not to sniff alone or in dangerous places
- Not to put plastic bags over their heads
- Use small rather than large plastic bags to reduce the risk of suffocation
- Not to smoke while sniffing as the substances used are highly flammable
- Knowing they should call an ambulance immediately if they become worried about a friend for any reason
- Not to use other drugs while sniffing as this increases the risk of accidents

Treatment options

Contact ADIS for advice or information on treatment or counselling (See **FACT SHEET** No.1

Contacts for ADIS number for your state)

How to help in an emergency

In an emergency

If a person is drowsy or unconscious - DIAL 000... then

- **Lay them on their side to prevent choking if they vomit**
- **Take away what they have been sniffing and make sure they are breathing fresh air**



If the person is conscious

- **Keep them calm and relaxed until they have completely sobered up**
- **Don't chase them or get them stressed or panicked**