

# Inhalants: Officer Reference Sheet

## LESSON 5

### ***Product Names:***

Organic solvents, nitrous oxide, nitrates, aerosols, airplane glue, nail polish remover, lighter fluid, gasoline, paints, hair spray.

### ***Slang Terms:***

Glue, Kick, Bang, Sniff, Huff, Poppers, Whippets, Texas Shoe Shine

## **Effects of Inhalants on Your Brain**

- Inhalants are substances or fumes from products, such as glue or paint thinner that are sniffed or “huffed” to cause an immediate high.
- They affect your brain with much greater speed and force than many other substances. They cause brain damage.
- They cause irreversible physical and mental damage before you know what’s happened.

## **Other Health Effects of Inhalants**

- Inhalants affect your heart. They starve the body of oxygen and force the heart to beat irregularly and more rapidly – that can be dangerous for your body.
- Inhalants damage other parts of your body. People who use inhalants can lose their sense of smell; experience nausea and nosebleeds; and develop liver, lung, and kidney problems.
- Use can cause sores on nose or mouth, diarrhea, and suffocation.
- Chronic use can lead to muscle wasting and reduced muscle tone and strength.
- Inhalants can cause sudden death. Inhalant users can die by suffocation, choking on their vomit, or having a heart attack.
- Inhalants cause severe depression.

## **Facts on Inhalant Use**

- Inhalants can kill you the very first time you use them.
- Inhalants include a large group of chemicals that are found in such household products as aerosol sprays, cleaning fluids, glue, paint, paint thinner, gasoline, propane, nail polish remover, correction fluid, and marker pens. None of these are safe to inhale – they all can kill you.
- Chemicals, like amyl nitrate and isobutyl nitrate (“poppers”) and nitrous oxide (“whippets”) are often sold at concerts and dance clubs. They can permanently damage your body and brain.
- Chronic inhalant abusers may permanently lost the ability to perform everyday functions, like walking, talking, and thinking.
- The vast majority of teens aren’t using inhalants. According to a 1998 study, only 1.1 percent of teens are regular inhalant users and 94 percent of teens have never even tried inhalants.

How can you tell if a friend is using inhalants? Sometimes it's tough to tell. But there are signs you can look for. If your friend has one or more of the following warning signs, he or she may be using inhalants:

- Slurred Speech
- Drunk, Dizzy, and Dazed Appearance
- Loss of Coordination
- Unusual Breath Odor
- Chemical Smell on Clothing
- Paint Stains on Body or Face
- Red Eyes
- Runny Nose
- Nausea and Vomiting

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q.** Since inhalants are found in household products, aren't they safe?

**A.** No. Even though household products like glue and air freshener have legal, useful purposes, when they are used as inhalants they are harmful and dangerous. These products are not intended to be inhaled.

**Q.** Doesn't it take many "huffs" before you're in danger?

**A.** No. One "huff" of an inhalant can kill you. Or the 10<sup>th</sup>. Or the 100<sup>th</sup>. Every huff can be dangerous. Even if you have huffed before without experiencing a problem, there's no way of knowing how the next huff will affect you.

**Q.** Can inhalants make me lose control?

**A.** Yes. Inhalants affect your brain and can cause you to suddenly engage in violent, or even deadly, behavior. You could hurt yourself or the people you love.

NCADI Tips for Teens – Inhalants

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, "Keeping Youth Drug Free" 2002.

## **Inhalants: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How long do you have to use inhalants before they can hurt you?**

Inhalants can kill you the very first time you use them. The chemicals in inhalants can cause the heart and lungs to stop function after only a few seconds. This is called Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome.

### **How can inhalants hurt you?**

Well, you already know that they can kill you instantly. They can also cause permanent damage to you such as hearing loss, limb spasms, and central nervous system or brain damage. They can also cause liver and kidney damage and keep the proper amount of oxygen from reaching your blood.

### **How is huffing different from smelling?**

Huffing is when you purposely breathe in the vapors from different chemicals such as gasoline or paint in order to get high. Because we breathe through our noses, we can't help but smell things around us and that is okay. For example, if you go to the gas station with your parents and happen to smell some gasoline while you are there, that is not huffing. But, if you purposely breathe in deeply from a container of gasoline, that is huffing.

### **Is using inhalants illegal?**

Yes, it is in some states. Although you can buy many things that are used as inhalants, you cannot legally use them as inhalants.

### **How can I tell if someone I know is huffing?**

Unless you see them huffing or they tell you that they are huffing, you cannot know for sure. There are signs to look for. People who use inhalants often will have paint or stains on their clothes, sores around their mouths, red eyes, runny noses, and may seem dizzy or "out of it." They will probably also act differently than you are used to like they may be really bad-tempered.

### **What can I do if someone I know is huffing?**

Tell a trusted adult like your parent, your teacher, or your **D.A.R.E.** Officer. You can also call 911 if there is no adult around and tell them where you are and where the person is who is huffing. They will help you.