



INHALANT ABUSE AND SUDDEN SNIFFING DEATH

WHAT IS INHALANT ABUSE?

Inhalant abuse involves the deliberate inhalation or "huffing" of concentrated amounts of one or more dangerous liquid or gaseous chemicals to produce a feeling of euphoria or "high". Among the substance abused this way are the solvents found in products such as paints, paint thinners, typewriter correction fluids and some glues, as well as propellants, refrigerants and fuels such as freon, butane, isobutane, propane and gasoline. The adverse effects of inhalant abuse can be immediate (for example, liver, kidney, brain, blood and lung toxicity).

WHAT IS SUDDEN SNIFFING DEATH?

Sudden sniffing death (SSD) can happen to a user at any time a solvent or gas is inhaled to get high: the first time a person experiments with inhalant abuse, or after years of this habit. It is impossible to predict who is at risk of SDS. Death actually happens within a few minutes after inhalation. Most victims die before making it to the hospital. SSD is caused by several factors:

1. Inhalants act directly on the brain to decrease the amount of oxygen delivered to the brain and the rest of the body.
2. The amount of oxygen available to the body is further decreased since the person is inhaling a chemical instead of air.
3. Increased sensitivity of the heart muscle to the body's own 'adrenalin' occurs. This can cause an irregular heart beat, which additionally interferes with the body's ability to pump blood and oxygen to the brain.
4. Finally, any excitement that could cause or lead to running, sudden motion, fear, anger, sex, trauma, etc., caused the body to release even more adrenalin (epinephrine) than usual.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF SOMEONE IS USING INHALANTS?

There is no simple way to identify inhalant abusers. However, changes in behavior patterns, attitudes, grades, relationships or friends should be viewed with suspicion of this or other types of substance abuse. Plastic bags, chemical soaked rags, tubes of glue, and strange chemical vapor smells may be clues. Recently, compressed air computer cleaner products have become a growing fad. The misconception that it only contains air adds to the deadly danger of inhaling its propellant. Inhalant abuse is most commonly, but not exclusively, seen in teens or preteens who are not old enough to legally purchase alcohol or who may not be able to afford marijuana or cocaine/crack. If you suspect that a son, daughter, or friend is involved with inhalant substance abuse, you can help them by talking openly about the hazards of this practice. Ideally the goal is prevention of substance abuse, but if it is already occurring, the goal should be treatment and counseling. It should not be ignored thinking that it will "just go away".

WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE?

The only way to combat this form of abuse is for parents, schools and our community to educate their children and discuss the dangers openly. We cannot legislate this form of substance abuse out of existence, since it involves common household products. The "cure" for this problem has to come from within us and user. Our communities need strong prevention, education, intervention, treatment and recovery programs.

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