

Inhalants

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'Inhalants' are a variety of dangerous chemicals found in every household, including cleaners and fuels that may be sniffed by young children either directly from their packaging or through plastic bags to achieve a 'drunken' like state.

Children as young as 7, but generally between the ages of 12 and 17 are known to be the most common users, and based on the 1996 Victorian School Students and Drug Use Survey we see that at least 24% of all students have tried inhalants at least once in their lifetime.

The reasons given by children for their experimentation consist of the desire to belong to a group, to deal with or escape emotional problems they may be facing, or because they are cheap and easier to obtain than other drugs.

The known effects of inhalants resemble those of alcohol use, including erratic behaviour, slurred speech, sneezing, coughing, nausea and vomiting. Excessive use may lead to eye, brain, liver, kidney and nerve damage – however these are rare occurrences.

The main danger resulting from sniffing include accidents such as falling from high places, suffocating on plastic bags used for sniffing, behaving recklessly, or choking on vomit when unconscious.

There are no clear signs that identify when a person has been using solvents, but some possible signals to watch out for include the possession of large amounts of these products, chemical smells on clothes and breath, unexplainable drunken behaviour, red eyes or spots around the mouth or nose, coughs and occasional nose bleeds.

If you suspect or find someone using inhalants, never chase, alarm or excite them – any confrontation whilst in their drunken state may lead to serious consequences, including the possibility of death.

For further information on this or other drugs, contact Evan Sycamnias at the Australian Greek Welfare Society on (03) 9388 9998.

* (Australian Institute on Alcohol and Addictions)