



# Youth-Serving Professionals Can Help Prevent Inhalant Use





**AUDIENCE:** Adults Only

## HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT INHALANT USE

Inhalant use is the intentional breathing in of gas and vapors for their mind-altering effects. There are over 1,000 common household, school, and industrial products that can be misused. When used in this way, inhalants are poisonous.

### **You can help prevent this problem by taking a few steps:**

- Find out about the types of products that can be misused and signs of misuse.
- Make sure children are getting the message about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, including inhalant use.
- Avoid buying products that can be easily misused. These include products that fall into the categories of fuels, nitrites, solvent-based products, and anything in an aerosol can.
- Buy water-based versions of air fresheners, correction fluids, glues, and magic markers.
- When you cannot use water-based products, require that the product be used with adult supervision. Always keep it safely away from children and teens. Locked cabinets are best.
- Talk to other professionals such as school principals, teachers, and after-school personnel about including prevention measures in their programs.
- Enjoy healthy activities with youth that offer a chance to reward them for positive choices or efforts.
- If you are concerned about a child's behavior, talk to your supervisor about what you have observed. Remember, one of the attractions of inhalants is that adults don't often ask youth about them.
- See the Resources section for more details and commend yourself for the steps you are taking to protect youth.

## EXAMPLES OF INHALANTS IN THE SCHOOL, HOME, AND OFFICE AND THEIR SAFER ALTERNATIVES

| Product Type             | Source of Inhalants                      | Prevention Strategies                                                                                                |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>General Supplies</b>  | Cements and glues                        | Use water-based products.<br>Supervise use of solvent-based products.                                                |
|                          | Correction fluid                         | Use water-based products.<br>Supervise use of solvent-based products.<br><i>Better idea:</i> Use correction tape.    |
|                          | Magic markers,<br>dry erase markers      | Use water-based products.<br>Supervise use of solvent-based products.<br><i>Better idea:</i> Use “low odor” markers. |
| <b>Cleaning Supplies</b> | Any product in an aerosol can            | Use hand pumps instead of aerosol cans.                                                                              |
|                          | Aerosol air fresheners and deodorizers   | Supervise use of these products.<br>If needed, use solid air fresheners.                                             |
|                          | Computer cleaner (“air duster”)          | Supervise use of these products.<br>Use canned carbon dioxide.                                                       |
| <b>Wood Shop</b>         | Paints, varnishes, stains, paint thinner | Use water-based products.<br>Supervise use of solvent-based products.                                                |
|                          | Contact cement                           | Use water-based products.<br>Supervise use of these products.                                                        |
|                          | Computer cleaner (“air duster”)          | Supervise use of these products.<br>Use canned carbon dioxide.                                                       |
| <b>Art Supplies</b>      | Rubber cement                            | Use water-based products.<br>Supervise use of these products.                                                        |
|                          | Printing inks                            | Use water-based products.<br>Supervise use of these products.                                                        |
|                          | Spray paints and clear finishes          | Use water-based products.<br>Supervise use of these products.                                                        |

| Product Type             | Source of Inhalants                                                                               | Prevention Strategies                                                                |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Auto</b>              | Degreasers, spray lubricants, solvents, Freon®, brake fluid, gasoline, lacquers, lacquer thinners | Supervise use of solvent-based products.                                             |
| <b>Health and Beauty</b> | Nail polish and nail polish remover, hair spray                                                   | Supervise use of these products.                                                     |
|                          | Deodorants                                                                                        | Supervise use of these products.<br>Use stick deodorants.                            |
| <b>Cooking Supplies</b>  | Cooking spray                                                                                     | Supervise use of these products.<br>Use oil in a spray pump.                         |
|                          | Whipping cream in aerosol cans, whipping cream cartridges (whippets)                              | Supervise use of these products.<br>Use whipped cream in a tub or make from scratch. |

### Here are some of the dangers of inhalant use:

- Breathing concentrated amounts of these gases and vapors can cause brain, nerve, kidney, and liver damage.
- Death can result from even one-time use. Some children have accidents, choke to death, or have heart attacks.
- For some, inhalant use becomes an addiction. Younger children may just use inhalants, while older youth are more likely to use inhalants with alcohol and other drugs.

### What are some of the reasons youth use inhalants?

- Inhalants are easy to obtain, free or inexpensive, and difficult to detect.
- Many adults are not aware of inhalants, so use may go unnoticed.
- Many children are not aware of how dangerous these products are.
- It takes effect very quickly.



## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF INHALANT USE?

**If you are concerned that a child or adolescent may be using inhalants, look for:**

- Empty product containers, especially butane lighters and aerosol cans
- Bags, rags, gauze, or soft drink cans that are used to inhale the fumes
- Paint, gasoline, or glue odors

**You may see symptoms such as:**

- An unusual harsh breath odor
- A rash, blisters, or soreness around the nose, mouth, or on the lips
- Runny nose, sniffing, and coughing
- Irritated or glazed eyes or dilated pupils

**If you see these signs, it is usually best to talk to the youth. A first step is to create a private time when you can be open to a positive discussion.**

- Express your concern for the youth's wellbeing.
- Share what you observed and why you are worried.
- Listen when he or she describes feelings and pressures.
- Support their strengths, so that they can be motivated to get back on track.
- Make it clear that you will take steps to talk to their parent/guardian about involving a treatment counselor.
- At no charge, download or order [Alcohol and Other Drugs: Is Your Teen Using?](#) from the [Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse](#) for more helpful hints on how to talk to youth about substances.

**What should you do if you find a person in crisis from using inhalants?**

- Lay the person on his or her side to prevent choking on vomit.
- Call 911 or your local emergency number and stay with the person until he or she sees a doctor.
- See that he or she gets fresh air.
- Provide reassurance.
- Remain calm. (Scaring or chasing the person may increase the risk of a heart attack.)
- Follow up to ensure that the youth receives an assessment for treatment. You can advise parents to call their health insurer or use one of the Resources on page 6 to consider the best options.



# RESOURCES

## Helplines

### Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline

Toll-free: 1-800-327-5050  
TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370  
7 days a week  
[HelplineMA.org](http://HelplineMA.org)

The Helpline can answer questions about substance misuse or make referrals to treatment for people of all ages.

### Emergency Services Programs (ESP)

Toll-free: 1-877-382-1609  
TTY: 1-800-249-9949  
24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year  
[www.masspartnership.com](http://www.masspartnership.com)

ESP is available to the uninsured, MassHealth subscribers, and many insured Massachusetts residents of all ages. This service can address issues that involve both substance misuse and mental health.

### Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention serving Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Toll-free: 1-800-222-1222  
TTY: 1-888-244-5313  
24 hours a day  
[maripoisoncenter.com](http://maripoisoncenter.com)

Contact the Center for product or poisoning information. In an immediate emergency, call 911 or your local emergency number.

## Web-based or Printed Information for Professionals and/or Parents

### Massachusetts Department of Public Health

[mass.gov/dph/inhalant](http://mass.gov/dph/inhalant)  
[mass.gov/parentpower](http://mass.gov/parentpower)

### Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse

Toll-free: 1-800-952-6637  
TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or  
1-800-439-2370  
[mass.gov/MAClearinghouse](http://mass.gov/MAClearinghouse)

Download or order free pamphlets and booklets on how to protect children from substance use and information on other health issues.

**Thank you for your professional  
support in keeping our youth healthy.**