

## Information for parents and guardians concerned about INHALANTS

Inhalants are everyday household products that some young people breathe in to feel a 'high'. Inhalant use can cause serious health risks.

The use of inhalants has presented at different times across generations. Recently, it has become a concern for young people following deaths linked to aerosol deodorant use. We understand that these reports will be concerning for parents. Our factsheet aims to help you learn about inhalants and how to talk to your teen.

### What are inhalants?

Inhalants are a variety of substances that can cause psychoactive, intoxicating or mind-altering effects.

### How are inhalants used?

Inhalant use involves breathing in chemical vapours through the mouth or nose. All inhalants are absorbed through the lungs and travel rapidly in the blood to the brain. It feels like getting drunk, but it happens very fast and also ends quickly.

'Chroming' is a term sometimes used to describe breathing in these substances. The terms 'nagging' and 'sniffing' are also used.

### Types of inhalants

| Aerosols    | Volatile substances | Gases                                                                  | Nitrates                    |
|-------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| spray paint | paint thinners      | butane lighters                                                        | air fresheners              |
| deodorants  | dry-cleaning fluids | propane tanks                                                          | leather cleaners            |
| hairsprays  | glues               | whipped cream dispenser / nitrous oxide (sold from dealers and online) | nail polish removers        |
|             |                     |                                                                        | poppers (sold in sex shops) |

## Why do young people use inhalants?

Adolescence is a time when young people learn about new ideas and behaviours. It is a time they “try out” adult roles and responsibilities. Curiosity is the most common reason given by young people for trying any new substance.

### Other reasons for use can include:

- A perception of low level of risk
- Easy access
- Low mood or using as a coping mechanism
- Peer pressure and social influences
- Curiosity about intoxication, alcohol and drugs
- Boredom or impulsivity

It can be hard to tell which young person could use inhalants because they are easy to get compared to other drugs.

## Effects and risks

Different types of inhalants can lead to different effects. The effects and risks can also depend on who is using them and if they have underlying health concerns.

### SERIOUS RISKS

Breathing in inhalants can cause sudden death. This is because they cause the heart to beat very fast and irregularly. This can lead to the heart suddenly stopping (cardiac arrest). This is sometimes called ‘sudden sniffing death syndrome’.

### Short-term effects

- A fast feeling of intoxication or feeling of euphoria
- Dizziness
- Slurred speech, lack of coordination, loss of balance
- Rush of heat (poppers)
- Giggling or laughing

### Long-term effects

Using inhalants over time can cause permanent damage to:

- brain
- kidneys
- liver

Inhalants can also lead to dependency. It often takes many years of research for doctors to understand the harmful side effects of drugs.

## Signs of use

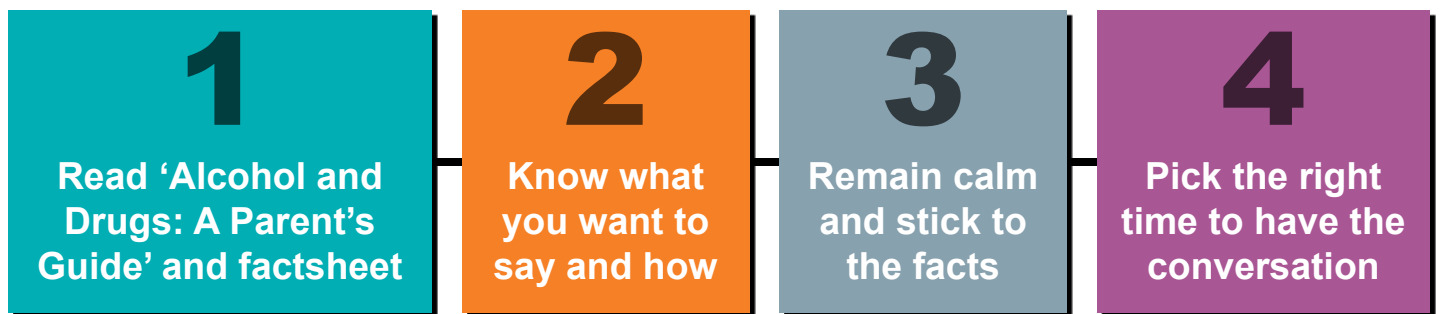
Possible signs your young person is using inhalants are listed below. There could be other explanations, the best way to know is through talking with your teen.

- Sores, rash or burns on the face, nose or hands
- Lots of aerosol cans with or without socks and cloths
- Acting drunk or intoxicated
- Changes in mood, health or social activities

## How to talk to your teen about inhalants?

Talking about substances can feel difficult, but an open and calm conversation can make a difference. It is important to explain the risks clearly, without creating curiosity about using. You may need to adapt what you say based on the age of the young person or if you think they are currently using.

The HSE's '**Alcohol and Drugs: A Parent's Guide**' offers practical advice for parents on how to talk about any substances with your teen.



### Before you start:

- Know what you want to say
- Create a safe space for open conversation
- Stick to the facts

### During the conversation:

- Listen without judging.
- Ask what they have heard and where they heard it (media, school or wider community). This will help you understand what they know and what the main issues are for them. Through this approach, you can then ask if they are aware of people using inhalants.
- Explain factual information on inhalants and other drugs. Don't provide a list of substances as this could create interest in using or focusing on one substance.
- If they are aware of inhalant use, talk about your concerns, including the serious health risks and risk of sudden death.

- Ask if they have any questions.
- Check if they understand why these substances are risky.
- If peer pressure is a concern, help them look at ways to manage situations.

## Prevention measures

- Store aerosols in supervised locations.
- Know where your teen is and who they are with.
- Schedule check-in calls if they are out with friends.
- Ensure they are dropped off and collected if going to venues or parties.
- Stay connected with other parents.
- Rules are helpful. Your son or daughter should know that they are not allowed to use any intoxicating substances, because you want them to stay safe and healthy.
- Share HSE factsheets and the HSE Parent's Guide with other parents.

## What to do in an inhalant emergency

### If a young person is using an inhalant:

- ✓ Approach the situation in a calm manner
- ✓ Do not startle them, as this can increase the risks to the heart and sudden death
- ✓ Open windows or doors to ventilate the area

### Call 112 immediately if they are showing signs of being intoxicated:

- ✓ slurred speech
- ✓ confusion
- ✓ losing consciousness

## Further information and support

If you have concerns about your child or need further information, support and advice are available through the services listed below:

The HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline provides confidential support, information and referrals to services. Call **Freephone 1800 459 459** or **email [helpline@hse.ie](mailto:helpline@hse.ie)**

A nitrous oxide specific factsheet is also available for parents on **[Drugs.ie](https://www.drugs.ie)**

HSE Alcohol and Drugs: A Parent's Guide is free to order from **[healthpromotion.ie](https://www.healthpromotion.ie)**