



Inhalants: Factsheet



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our [Help/Q&A section](#) for more details.

Year: Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Inhalants

Tags: volatile solvents, petrol sniffing, aerosol sprays, propane, nitrous oxide, laughing gas, nitrites, nangs, bulbs

Time Allocated: Partial lesson (under 45mins)

Origin: Australian

Cost:

Free

Attachments

 [Inhalants: Detailed Resource \(for Parents/Teachers\)](#)

What are Inhalants?

Inhalants, also known as volatile substances or solvents, are substances that are sniffed or breathed in through the nose and/or mouth to give the person using the drug an immediate high.

There are four main types of inhalants:

- Volatile solvents
- Aerosol sprays
- Gases
- Nitrites

Personal Stories

"My son was sniffing aerosols. Not all the time but now and then. He was at my sister's house and he inhaled an air freshener. He passed out and went into cardiac arrest which killed him instantly." —Natalie, 41

How many young people have used Inhalants?

According to the 2017 Australian secondary schools' survey, approximately 1 in 8 (13%) Australian students (aged 12–17 years old) reported having used inhalants in the last year.

What are the effects of Inhalants?

Most inhalants have an immediate effect. The high usually only lasts for a few minutes. Users sometimes keep on sniffing to prolong the high, in some cases this can lead to loss of consciousness, brain damage, and even death.

The effects of inhalants can be immediate or long-term, as listed in the table below.

Immediate

- Increased heart rate
- Feeling light headed and dizzy
- Loss of inhibitions
- Agitation
- Loss of coordination and balance
- Irritation to the eyes, nose and throat
- Aggressive behaviour
- Slurred speech
- Headaches
- Confusion and drowsiness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Hallucinations (e.g. seeing or hearing things that aren't really there)
- Suffocation
- Seizures
- 'Sudden sniffing death' syndrome (caused by heart failure that can occur within a few minutes)

Long-term

- Dependence (addiction)
- Brain damage
- Tremors
- Problems breathing
- Loss of hearing and vision
- Increased risk of leukaemia from petrol sniffing
- Damage to the immune system, bones, nerves, kidney, liver, heart, and lungs

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University.

Download attachment for more information and a list of sources.

- Credit to the Home Office for quotes adapted from **Talk to Frank**.

Page last reviewed: 5 February 2020.