



A Campaign to Prevent Inhalant Abuse
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services
Massachusetts Department of Public Health

MASSACHUSETTS INHALANT ABUSE TASK FORCE

A Parent's Guide:
*Preventing Inhalant Abuse
Among Children and Teens*

OCTOBER 2005

Audience: Adults Only



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

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Summer 2005

Dear Concerned Parents:

We are asking your help to tackle an unusual substance abuse problem. It's called **inhalant abuse**. Inhalant abuse is the breathing of gases and vapors, on purpose, for their drug-like effects. Children as young as nine have tried this after hearing about it from their friends or adults. In Massachusetts, one out of eleven 8th graders has tried inhaling common household and school products (a few examples are: butane lighters and refills, gasoline, computer air duster, and products in aerosol cans). Many children don't know how dangerous it is—not only can it cause brain damage, but it can also be deadly, even the first time it is used.

How can you protect your children, and keep them healthy? Parents can have an important effect on their children and teenagers' decisions about alcohol and other drug abuse. There are steps that you can take, especially during the elementary and middle school years, which can make a big difference.

- Giving your children guidelines can have a powerful influence on their choices. Be clear about the rules and that there will be consequences for breaking them.
- Reading this packet will give you a few important steps you can take to protect your children.
 - You will find out how to convey the fact that inhalants are really poisons and fire hazards.
 - You will get information about how you can use safer products.
 - You will have some ideas about how you can ask others to support your efforts. and
 - Please remember: don't give children lists of products or information that tells them how they are abused. We have labeled some of the pages of this packet "Adults Only."

To request other free pamphlets on preventing inhalant, alcohol and other drug abuse contact the Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse by calling 1-800-952-6637 or by visiting <http://www.macclearinghouse.com>. The Bureau of Substance Abuse Services of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health offers a range of services and invites you to visit our website at www.mass.gov/dph/bsas/bsas.htm for information on prevention, treatment and other resources.

We appreciate all of your efforts to help keep Massachusetts youth healthy.

Sincerely,

Michael Botticelli
Assistant Commissioner
Substance Abuse Services

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Parents:

Do You Know About Inhalant Abuse?

Here's What We Know:

- One out of every thirteen Massachusetts ninth-twelfth grade students has tried inhaling gases or solvent vapors for their drug-like effects.
- Abuse may start as early as the third grade and peaks in eighth and ninth grades.

Here's What's Being Abused:

- Any product in an aerosol can
- All fuels (gases and liquid)
- Solvent-based correction fluid, markers, glues
- Over 1,000 shop and household products

Here Are The Dangers Of Inhalant Use:

- Breathing 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.

Why Are Teenagers Using 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.

Here's What You Can Do About Inhalant Abuse:

- Inhalants are poisons. Please become aware of the problem.
- Educate yourself and other adults about how to prevent inhalant abuse, the types of products that can be abused, and signs of abuse.
- Make sure your children are getting the message about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse including inhalant abuse.
- Be clear about the laws and rules about inhalants, alcohol, and other substances. Let them know what will happen if they break the rules. They will profit from having to regain your trust in a specific period of time. Visit www.maclearringhouse.com or call 1-800-952-6637 for booklets on how to talk to your children or teens about these issues.
- Always read the labels and follow directions on the products that you use.
- Talk to your school principals, teachers, and health educators about including prevention activities in the classroom.
- Don't buy products that can be easily abused. These include solvent-based correction fluids, some types of glues, air fresheners, and magic markers. Instead, buy water-based versions of these products.



- Be aware of how much of an item is being used. When solvent-based products are necessary, they should be used with adult supervision.
- If you are concerned about your child's behavior, ask about inhalants and be specific about why you are worried. Remember, one of the attractions of inhalants is that adults don't often ask youth about them.

What Are The Signs Of Inhalant Use? If You Suspect A Child Or Adolescent Is 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
- 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 and dilated pupils

How Might A Person Who Is Using Inhalants Act?

- They may display extreme mood swings, uncontrolled laughter
- Can be agitated or sleepy
- Have increased irritability and anger or violent outbursts
- Have nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, hallucinations, and seizures.
- Display risky behavior or show off

Parents: Do You Know About Inhalant Abuse? (continued)

What Should You Do If You Are Concerned That Your Child May Have Used An Inhalant?

- Through its network of community providers, the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health supports outpatient and residential programs for youth who are using inhalants and other drugs. For information on programs, call the Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline at **1-800-327-5050**, 24 hrs/day. Volunteers will refer you to counselors who can help assess if there is a problem, whether or not you have health insurance.

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 an ambulance and stay with the person until he or she sees a doctor.
- See that he or she gets fresh air.
- Avoid distractions and try to keep the person from moving.
- Remain calm. Scaring or chasing the person may increase the risk of a heart attack.

For More Information About Inhalant Abuse, Contact:

- The Massachusetts Inhalant Abuse Task Force at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, **617-624-5140**; **www.state.ma.us/dph/inhalant**
- The Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline **1-800-327-5050** statewide (for referrals to treatment)
- Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention Serving Massachusetts and Rhode Island **1-800-222-1222** (for product information)

**Parents: *Do You Know About Inhalant Abuse?*
(continued)**

***Massachusetts Regional Centers
For Healthy Communities***

- Western Massachusetts Center for Healthy Communities 489 Whitney Ave., Second Floor; Holyoke, MA 01040 Telephone: **1-800-850-3880**
- Central Massachusetts Center for Healthy Communities 44 Front Street; Suite 280; Worcester, MA 01608 Telephone: **508-438-0515**
- Northeast Center for Healthy Communities 101 Amesbury Street; Lawrence, MA 01841 Telephone: **978-688-2323**
- Regional Center for Healthy Communities (serving suburban Boston and Metrowest) 552 Massachusetts Ave., Second floor; Cambridge, MA 02139 Telephone: **617-441-0700**
- Greater Boston Center for Healthy Communities (serving Boston, Chelsea, and Winthrop) 622 Washington Street; Dorchester, MA 02124 Telephone: **617-423-4337**
- Southeast Center for Healthy Communities 942 West Chestnut St.; Brockton, MA 02301 Telephone: **508-583-2350**

**Excerpts from Massachusetts Laws
about Inhalant Abuse**

*Massachusetts General Law
Chapter 270 Crimes Against Public Health*

***Section 18. Substance Having Property
Of Releasing Toxic Vapors***

No person shall intentionally smell or inhale the fumes of any substance having the property of releasing toxic vapors, for the purpose of causing a condition of intoxication, euphoria, excitement, exhilaration, stupefaction, or dulled senses or nervous system, nor possess, buy or sell any such substance for the purpose of violating or aiding another to violate this section.

This section shall not apply to the inhalation of anesthesia for medical or dental purposes.

Whoever violates the provisions of this section shall be punished by a fine of not more than two hundred dollars or by imprisonment for not more than six months, or both.

Any person who is discovered by a police officer or special police officer in the act of violating this section may be arrested without a warrant by such police officer or special police officer, and held in custody, in jail, or otherwise, until a complaint is made against him for such offense which complaint shall be made as soon as practicable and in any case within twenty-four hours, Sundays and legal holidays excepted.

***Section 19. Glue Or Cement; Sale To Minors;
Smelling Deterrent Ingredients***

Any person who sells glue or cement to a minor shall require such minor to properly identify himself and write his name and address legibly in a permanently bound register. The seller shall keep such register available for police inspection for a period of six months after the last sale is recorded therein. No such glue or cement shall be sold to a minor unless it contains allyl isothiocyanate (oil of mustard) or some other equally effective and safe deterrent against smelling or inhaling the fumes of such glue or cement.

As used in this section, "glue" or "cement" shall mean any glue or cement that contains a solvent or chemical having the property of releasing toxic vapors.

Whoever violates the provisions of this section shall be punished by a fine of not more than two hundred dollars or by imprisonment for not more than six months, or both.

As Of July, 14 2004

See mass.gov for penalties for using glue or other substances while operating motor vehicles, aircrafts and other laws.



Audience: Adults Only
**Examples of Inhalants in the School,
 Home, and Office and Safer Alternatives**

Product Type	Source of Inhalant	Prevention Strategies		
		Use "Water-Based" Products	Supervise Use of Solvent-based Products	Other Strategies
General Supplies	Cements and glues	●	●	
	Typewriter correction fluid	●	●	Better idea: "Use correction Tape"
	Magic markers, dry erase markers	●	●	Better idea: Use "Low Odor" markers
Cleaning Supplies	Any product in an aerosol can			Use hand pumps instead of aerosol cans
	Aerosol air fresheners & deodorizers		●	Use solid air fresheners
	Computer cleaner ("air duster")		●	Use canned carbon dioxide
Wood Shop	Paints, varnishes, stains, paint thinner	●	●	
	Contact cement	●	●	
Art Supplies	Rubber cement	●	●	
	Printing inks	●	●	
	Spray paints and clear finishes	●	●	
Auto	Degreasers, spray lubricants, solvents, Freon®, brake fluid, gasoline, lacquers, lacquer thinners		●	
Health and Beauty	Nail polish and nail polish remover, hair spray		●	
	Deodorants		●	Use stick deodorants
Cooking Supplies	Cooking spray		●	Use oil in a spray pump
	Whipping cream in aerosol cans, whipping cream cartridges (whippets)		●	Use whipped cream in a tub or make from scratch

Strategies For Decreasing The Risk Of Inhalant Abuse

1. Identify products that can be abused. One clue is a label warning: "Intentional misuse by deliberately concentrating and inhaling the contents can be harmful or fatal." (From a can of cooking spray); "Avoid breathing vapors." (From a can of paint); "Use in a well ventilated area." (From a can of spray lubricant).



**Examples of Inhalants in the School, Home,
and Office and Safer Alternatives (cont.)**

2. Find non-toxic substitutes. Many products such as correction fluid, glues, magic markers, paints, and stains have 'water-based' or 'non-toxic' versions. Be aware that some products marked with an "AP Non-Toxic" label contain solvents and are being abused by students.
3. When a safer product cannot be substituted, use under close supervision. Account for usage, check product inventory going in and out, and be aware of disappearing supplies.
4. Don't discuss specific products. This may arouse curiosity and lead to increased experimentation. Teach children about the dangers of vapors and gases and about safe use of products. Avoid making the connection that these products can be used as drugs and always stress that these products are dangerous poisons, toxins, and pollutants. A chart like the one above is intended for adults only.
5. Call the Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention Serving Massachusetts and Rhode Island 1-800-222-1222 for information on specific products or poisons.

Consumer Alert—Computer Air Duster

*The Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services*

Many people do not know that computer air duster can be harmful. Used to blow dust and debris out of computers, keyboards, and mice, this common school, office, and household product often contains a pressurized, odorless, flammable gas.* It can be poisonous when intentionally inhaled in a concentrated form.

“WARNING: Do not deliberately concentrate and/or inhale this product. You could instantly die, suffer brain damage, or other dangerous and permanent health effects. To prevent accidental or intentional misuse or abuse, keep out of the reach of children and teens.”

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health asks the public to keep safety in mind when using computer air duster.

Read The Label – Heed The Label.

Keep these products out of reach of children and adolescents. Allow use only when there is adult supervision. Don't take for granted the safety of products in aerosol cans—read and act on these warnings.

Talk To Your Children.

Make sure that children and adolescents understand that these products are poisonous and were never intended to be put in your body. These products, like all aerosol cans, contain toxic, flammable gases that should not be breathed in concentrated form. This message will be most effective if it is part of ongoing discussions about safety.

Read The Label – Heed The Label.

It could save a child's life.

For more information about inhalant abuse or how to talk to your children about other substance abuse, contact The Massachusetts Inhalant Abuse Task Force at The Massachusetts Department of Public Health at **617-624-5140**, **TTY 617-624-6001** or visit our web site www.state.ma.us/dph/inhalant.



Four Ways That Parents Can Make A Difference: *Protecting Children or Teens from Inhalant Abuse*

Inhalant abuse is a silent epidemic that can only be stopped when parents, educators, and the general public get involved before our children do. This packet contains the information and strategies you can use to reduce inhalant abuse in your community.

Take Action—Try The Following Activities In Your Community:

1 Keep these materials in a safe place.

They contain the most recent Massachusetts information on inhalants and other drugs of abuse as well as strategies for prevention.

2 Get the word out to adults!

Distribute inhalant prevention materials to other parents, educators, youth workers, and other concerned individuals. All handouts can be easily copied but materials marked as “Adults Only” should not be given to youth as this could increase their curiosity about inhalants.

3 Educate Youth.

Give children copies of “Inhalants Poison Your Body.” (Free copies are available to order through <http://www.maclearinghouse.com> or via telephone at 1-800-952-6637). The main prevention message is that inhalants are poisons! Avoid equating inhalants with drugs unless teens are already making that association. Avoid telling youth what products may be misused, how they are abused, or that they can get you “high.” Teach about the safer use of products.

4 Choose safer products for your home.

Purchase safer products and reduce access to solvents, gases, and aerosol cans. Encourage your local school and community programs to do the same. Together, we can make Massachusetts safer for children and teens.



**Four Ways That Parents Can Make A
Difference (continued): Contact Numbers**

- **The Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse, The Medical Foundation**
1-800-952-6637 or www.maclearinghouse.com for resources such as:
 - Be the First to Talk to Your Pre-teen about Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (English, Spanish or Portuguese)
 - 7 Ways to Protect Your Teen from Alcohol and Other Drugs (English or Spanish)
 - Preparing Your Young Children for a Healthy, Drug-free Future (English)
 - Inhalants Poison Your Body (English)
- **The Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline**
1-800-327-5050 statewide (for referrals to treatment)
- **The Massachusetts Inhalant Abuse Task Force at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health**
617-624-5140; www.state.ma.us/dph/inhalant for additional resource materials
- **Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention Serving Massachusetts and Rhode Island**
1-800-222-1222 (for product information)

For more information about inhalant abuse,
contact the **Massachusetts Regional Centers for Healthy Communities:**

- **Western Massachusetts Center for Healthy Communities**
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- **Greater Boston Center for Healthy Communities (serving Boston, Chelsea, and Winthrop)**
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- **Southeast Center for Healthy Communities**
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