



# LAKE COUNTY NARCOTICS AGENCY

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## Parent's Guide Week #4 Inhalants & Prescription Medications

This week our drug discussion begins with Inhalants, and then we talk about Prescription Drug safety. Inhalants are the 4th highest drug used by youth, preceded by alcohol, tobacco, and abused prescription medications (2009). Those youth who have used inhalants are 3 times more likely to use marijuana, and 7 times more likely to use hallucinogens. Although inhalants are used by people of all ages, the highest rate of inhalant use is among youth between the ages of 7 and 17. The highest prevalence rate of inhalant use is among students in grades 5 through 12. Inhalant use rises with increasing grade level and peaks around 9th grade. The decreased inhalant use that occurs after 9th grade coincides with increased alcohol and other drug use. Availability, low cost, and lack of parental awareness of inhalants are key factors behind their popularity. Research suggests inhalant use is prevalent among both sexes, however recent data indicates use among females is moving beyond male use.

**Short-term effects** of inhalants appear soon after inhalation. After inhaling there is a euphoric feeling, characterized by lightheadedness, exhilaration, and vivid fantasies. Nausea, drooling, sneezing and coughing, lack of muscular coordination, slow reflexes, and sensitivity to light may also occur. A feeling of being very powerful may lead to reckless, violent and bizarre behavior. Repeated inhalation, over short periods of time, result in a loss of physical control followed by hallucinations, unconsciousness, and/or seizures. Behavioral symptoms of **Regular** users include mental confusion, fatigue, depression, irritability, hostility, and paranoia. Brain damage occurs the first time and every time an inhalant user sniffs or huffs. The brain damage adds up and is permanent. Signs of brain damage as result of continued inhalant use can include severely impaired mental function, lack of motor coordination, and tremors.

Some myths that kids have about inhalant use:

- **Myth:** Regular use of inhalants is more dangerous than occasional use. **Fact:** Occasional use of inhalants is extremely dangerous. Inhalants cause permanent brain damage the first and every time they are used.
- **Myth:** Occasional use of inhalants is perceived to be safe. **Fact:** Huffing can cause death with one time use. "Sudden Sniffing Death" can happen at any time during inhalant use. Three (3) out of ten (10) kids who die from SSD, **die the first time they inhale**.
- **Myth:** Inhalants are a drug of older youth, not commonly associated with use by elementary age children. **Fact:** Many 3rd and 4th graders are already experimenting with inhalants. In 1994 the PRIDE survey was conducted throughout Lake County. On this survey 8.6% of the 4th graders in Lake County indicated they had used *inhalants within the last 12 months to get high*. This number has decreased in Lake County since 1999. I would like to believe that our P.L.U.S. program has been a part of that decrease.

**INHALANTS:** Inhalants are a growing issue among our youth. **When the P.L.U.S. officer talks with the students about inhalants he/she does not allow any inhalant products to be mentioned by name.** We ask the students to give a definition for inhalants. Things like: chemical vapor, something you breathe in to get high, something not prescribed by a doctor, and something not intended to be breathed into the body are mentioned. This definition allows the students to know what the P.L.U.S. officer is talking about without naming products.

**Tolerance** to inhalants happens quickly. What takes 2-3 huffs to get high the first time will take 4-5 huffs in a few weeks to get the same high. This means more and more dangerous chemicals are put into the body doing

more and more damage. *Addiction* also happens quickly. An inhalant high lasts on average 15-30 seconds. What do you think is going to happen when the intense high wears off so quickly? You're right, huff it again, and again, and again, and.....!

Another issue with inhalant use is "Sudden Sniffing Death". There is no warning or indication that something is wrong or your body is having a deadly reaction, you just die. SSD can happen at any point in the inhalant process. SSD can happen the first time inhalants are used, the hundredth time, who knows? A scary statistic about inhalants is: 3 out of 10 people, who die from SSD, **die the first time they inhale**.

We talk about Inhalants being **B.A.D.** drugs. **B**rain damage; **A**ddiction; and **D**eath occur from inhalant use. We then move into a discussion about Prescription Medications.

The first thing we explain is the difference between a "drug" and a "medication". The P.L.U.S. officer explains that medications are prescribed by a doctor and/or bought at a store. The officer further explains that medications, when used correctly, help to improve a person's health. However, when medications are abused they are just as dangerous as any other drug. We explain that medications can be abused by:

- not following the directions for use.
- taking more than what is prescribed.
- taking the meds more often than prescribed.
- taking meds that belong to someone else.
- taking meds without parents permission and/or direction.
- mixing medications with alcohol or other drugs.

Prescription Medication abuse has been rising steadily throughout Ohio since 2007. In 2009 the number of Schedule II pain medications dispensed through prescriptions in Ohio was equal to 67 pills per every person living in the state at that time. I know in 2009 I had no pain meds dispensed to myself, so someone else got mine.

Among the age group of 10-14 year olds *prescription medication abuse* ranks second on the list of "drugs of choice". Looking at the reason why this age group ranks Rx abuse so high leads me to thinking: "Where do kids get Rx meds?" The answer most often reported by teens is "at home in the cabinet". In Lake County we have Prescription Medication Turn- In sites. This is where you can take any unused prescription medications and get rid of them safely. For a link to where these sites are and the hours of operation please go to our web page at [www.lakecountyohio.gov/LCNA](http://www.lakecountyohio.gov/LCNA) and click on the link *Prescription Turn-In Sites*. By getting medications out of the cabinet we take them out of the hands of abusers.

Prescription **pain killers** are the most highly abused medications around. Many of these pain medications are opioid based drugs, which makes them very much like Heroin. In fact one of the things we know is many persons who abuse pain medications move on to abusing heroin. We have seen a huge increase in heroin overdoses and death in Lake County in 2010. In fact if you add up all of the deaths from heroin in 2008 and 2009 it falls way short of the deaths from heroin in 2010.

Prescription **stimulants** are drugs that rev up a persons body. Increased heart rate and blood pressure, restlessness, inability to sleep, and loss of appetite are most common. Aggression and paranoia become serious issues the more stimulants are abused. When a person tries to stop using stimulants depression and loss of energy (feeling tired all the time) occur. These depressed feelings will often lead to the person back to abusing stimulants.

Inhalants and Prescription Medications are difficult to talk about because we don't want to give our children *ideas*. A good way to approach this topic is to ask your child what he/she knows about the topic. Any product your child mentions is a product you *need* to talk about. If you need additional inhalant or Rx medication information please feel free to call Officer Willis at the Lake County Narcotics Agency, 440-350-3302, check out the internet, and please attend the P.L.U.S. Parents Night.

#### **Student/Parent Homework (Week 4):**

Discuss with your child what you see as the dangers of inhalant use and medication misuse. Your child needs to have this discussion with you! You are the most important factor in your child's life when it comes to making good decisions about not using drugs. Please take time to review what your child has written about following doctor's orders and parent's rules about taking any medication. Please be sure to sign the homework sheet.