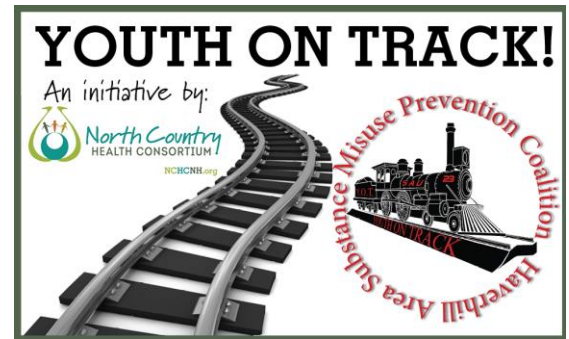


## **Keeping Your Children Safe from Dangers Inside the Home as Stay-at-Home Orders Continue: Part 2 Inhalants and Aerosols**

By: Mariah Coulstring



Often unrecognized for their misuse potential, inhalants and aerosols are specifically dangerous to children and teenagers. It is easy to miss the risk they pose when discussing dangers in the home in regard to substances of misuse and abuse. National surveys reveal that nearly 21.7 million Americans aged 12 and older have used inhalants at least once in their lives, and the population under 18 is most at risk. Inhalants and aerosols are accessible and are often the first substances of abuse for young people, even before many have experimented with tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs.

### **What are inhalants and how are they misused?**

You might be familiar with the terms “huffing,” “sniffing,” or “whippets.” They all refer to the practice of inhaling chemicals through the lungs and into the bloodstream to produce intoxication. Inhalants are usually found in household products, such as cleaning liquids, glue, spray paint, hair spray, whipped cream canisters, and nail polish remover, and other products that contain aerosols or volatile solvents, to name a few. Volatile solvents are liquids that vaporize at room temperature such as gasoline, while aerosols contain propellant such as in hairspray. Fumes and chemical vapors that are released from these products are inhaled by the user to create a quick and short intoxicating effect.

Methods for misusing inhalants include: sniffing the chemicals directly from the canister, spraying the chemicals into a bag or balloon and inhaling the fumes, soaking a cloth in the chemicals to sniff, or spraying the product directly into the mouth or nose.

### **What are the effects and dangers of misusing inhalants?**

The experience of becoming intoxicated from inhalants is similar to that of alcohol. Symptoms include dizziness, slurred speech, lightheadedness, issues with coordination, and sometimes hallucinations. Because the effects of inhalants last for only a few minutes at a time, users will usually inhale multiple times over the span of a few hours.

This practice can lead to unconsciousness, and even death. Referred to as “Sudden Sniffing Death,” an episode of inhalant misuse can kill a healthy young person, even after only one time. Brain damage and coma can result from a build-up of toxins within the brain.

“Parents and children need to know that even sporadic or single episodes of inhalant abuse can be extremely dangerous,” said Nora Volkow, Director of the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA). “Inhalants can disrupt heart rhythms and cause death from cardiac arrest, or lower oxygen levels enough to cause suffocation. Regular abuse of

these substances can result in serious harm to vital organs, including the brain, heart, kidneys, and liver.”

### **Recognize the signs that your child might be abusing inhalants**

Look for:

- Chemical smells on clothing, in bedroom, or on breath
- Paint or greasy/oily stains on clothing or on face and hands
- Bloodshot or dilated eyes
- Chapped lips or rash-like appearance on face
- Runny nose and/or frequent nosebleeds
- Empty spray cans and soaked rags that are thrown away and/or concealed
- Behaviors of intoxication, such as slurred speech, inattention, loss of coordination, irritability, impaired judgement, confusion
- Nausea/loss of appetite and depression
- Changes in friend groups
- Spending excess time in garage and/or kitchen and bathroom looking for products
- Increase in headaches and disruptions in vision

Parents and caregivers can make a difference in their child’s decision to use or misuse substances. Showing you care, asking questions, and simply talking about it is a good place to start.

For more information visit:

- **National Institute of Drug Abuse:** [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov) and use the drop-down menu under “drugs of abuse” to learn more about specific substances or view their many publications and research articles.
- **Partnership for Drug-Free Kids:** [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org) or [www.drugfreenh.org](http://www.drugfreenh.org) features a parent blog and other tips and toolkits for parents and caregivers who are looking for ways to connect with their teens and address if they think they are using.
- **Want to talk to a live person?** Call AskPETRA (**P**revention, **E**ducation, **T**reatment, **R**ecovery **A**ssistance) at (603)259-1729, Monday – Friday, 8am – 4:30 pm to be connected with Northern NH professionals who will help to provide local resources.

Stay tuned for Part 3 where we will talk about alcohol and its increased use during quarantine.

Youth on Track is a column dedicated to youth substance misuse prevention and education in our community and is brought to you by the Haverhill Area Substance Misuse Prevention Coalition (HASMPC). Mariah Coulstring is the Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Program Coordinator for HASMPC and employee of the North Country Health Consortium (NCHC) in Littleton, NH, the hub of the regional public health network that also serves as the fiscal agent for HASMPC.

Please visit us on Facebook by searching [@HASMPC](#) and contact me with questions, comments, or suggestions for topics at: [mcoulstring@nchcnh.org](mailto:mcoulstring@nchcnh.org) or call (603) 259-3700 X251.