“Inhalant” Abuse

Scenarios: A 16-year-old boy is found dead after inhaling fumes from an aerosol air freshener. A teen dies from sniffing nitrous oxide. A group of Central Florida pre-teens recently became ill after obtaining freon from a school air conditioning unit.

Products: Children as young as 10 years old have abused:

- spot removers
- hair spray
- glue
- polish removers
- deodorants & air fresheners
- gasoline
- paint thinners
- typewriter correction fluids
- nitrous oxide
- disposable lighters
- whipped cream

How do inhalants affect the body? After inhaling the product for a short time, inhalants may create a feeling of excitation followed by drowsiness, headache, dizziness or respiratory irritation. Long-term abuse causes brain/kidney/liver damage. In some cases, instant death occurs because the heart begins beating erratically (ventricular fibrillation), resulting in “sudden sniffing death.”

Signs of regular use include:

- paint or stains on the face or clothes
- red or runny eyes or nose
- spots or sores around the nose or mouth
- chemical breath odor
- anxiety, irritability, excitability

Awareness and prevention: Parents can observe their children for the signs of abuse and changes in their child’s routines and behavior. Studies have shown that a high percentage of children have abused inhalants, but a low percentage of parents think children actually abuse these substances. Efforts such as family discussions, education and prompt treatment will help. For more information, visit www.inhalants.org.

For more information or for medical advice, Call Florida Poison Information Center – Tampa 1-800-222-1222