

# Volatile Substance Abuse Factsheet



Most homes contain over 50 products that are volatile substances.

This includes gas lighter refills, aerosols containing hairspray, deodorants and air fresheners, tins or tubes of glue, some paints, thinners and correcting fluids, cleaning fluids, surgical spirit, dry-cleaning fluids and petroleum products.

## The effects

- People say it's like being drunk. You might feel dizzy and have the giggles. It can be difficult to think straight.
- The effects last for a short time so users tend to keep repeating the dose to keep the feeling going.
- Some people feel like they have a hangover after use. It can cause bad headaches and make you feel very tired.
- Some substances can leave a red rash around the mouth.
- Some substances make you hallucinate. This can last for up to 45 minutes.

## The risks

- People can be physically sick and blackout. Too much can result in a coma.
- There's a risk of heart problems which could kill users the very first time they sniff.
- Squirting gas products down the throat is a particularly dangerous way of taking the drug. It can make the throat swell so you can't breathe and slows down your heart.
- Inhaling from a plastic bag over your head could cause suffocation and death.
- Long-term abuse of solvents has been shown to damage the brain, liver and kidneys.
- Sniffing can affect your judgment and when you're high there's a real danger you'll try something risky and have a serious accident.
- Volatile substance abuse kills an average of one person every week in the UK. It kills more children and young people aged 10-15 than all illegal drugs put together.
- Using solvents in combination with alcohol can lead to an increased risk of death.

## The law

- Possessing solvents, unlike some other drugs, is not illegal.
- It is an offence for shop keepers to sell a cigarette lighter refill containing butane to anyone under the age of 18 years.
- It is an offence to supply a product to a person under the age of 18 years knowing or suspecting that it is going to be abused.
- The number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders due to volatile substance abuse is increasing.
- Crimes committed whilst high include assaults, thefts and vandalism and more serious crimes