

AOD Quarterly



Bringing you the latest information on alcohol and other drugs

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Welcome to the AOD Quarterly Newsletter, a new publication from the Safe and Drug-Free Youth Section of Fairfax County Public Schools. This newsletter will be published quarterly and will bring you up-to-date information on alcohol and other drugs (AOD). This month's edition contains information on a new and dangerous game being played by children: the blackout game. Also included in this edition are articles about alcohol, marijuana, and inhalants.

To receive further information on these subjects, contact Eileen McLaughlin at 703-876-5261.

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Inhalants



The drug of choice for many pre-teens and older teens can be found in every household in America. Inhalants are common household products like spray paint, hairspray, white-out, spray deodorants, and air freshener spray; solvents like nail polish remover, paint thinner, gasoline, and permanent markers; adhesives such as rubber cement and household glue; gases like nitrous oxide, butane, propane, Freon, and helium; and propellants such as those used in Dust-Off, whipped cream, and spray food products. Inhalants are easily accessible—they are found under the sink, in the office, and in the garage. Dust-Off and spray deodorants are being abused at school by middle school and high school students who keep these items in their lockers or backpacks.

There are several terms associated with inhalant abuse. “Inhaling” is when the vapors from these products are sniffed directly from the can, bottle, or container. “Bagging” is when the vapors from these products are sprayed into a bag, an empty can, or another container

and then inhaled. If the vapors are sprayed or poured onto a cloth or a piece of clothing (e.g. a shirt sleeve) and inhaled deeply, it is referred to as “huffing.”

When vapors are inhaled they are absorbed through the lungs where they enter the bloodstream and travel to the brain and other tissues throughout the body. Most inhalants act as a central nervous system depressant and have effects similar to alcohol. Immediate effects of inhalants include relaxation, slurred speech, euphoria, hallucinations, drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, and vomiting. Users can die the first time they try inhalants from heart failure or from suffocating on plastic bags or vomit. If they don’t die from inhalant abuse, long-term users suffer memory loss, concentration problems, visual disturbances including blindness, motor problems, and peripheral nerve damage. Chronic inhalant use leads to other serious health problems and permanent damage to the brain, liver, kidney, and bone marrow.

Signs and symptoms of inhalant use:

- Paint stains on the body or clothing
- Spots or sores around the mouth
- Red or runny eyes or nose
- Chemical breath odor
- Drunk, dazed, or dizzy appearance
- Nausea, loss of appetite
- Anxiety, excitability, irritability

If you suspect that someone has been using inhalants, remain calm and help the person stay calm. Excitement and stimulation can cause hallucinations or violence. Too much activity can lead to cardiac arrest. If the person is not breathing, call 911. CPR should be administered until help arrives. Once the person has recovered, seek professional help for the abuser. School counselors, teachers, school nurses, and other school personnel should be educated as to the dangers of inhalants, as well as signs and symptoms to look for. Parents and students need education about this dangerous type of substance abuse.

The Blackout Game

Many of the nation’s middle school students are discovering a cheap but dangerous way to get high. They are participating in a “blackout game” where they choke themselves with ropes, belts, or their bare hands, depriving their brains of oxygen to get a drug-like high. Students as young as 10 years old are “choking” themselves or each other in an attempt to get a short-lived high. This deadly game goes by many names including blackout, space monkey, funky chicken, flat liner, tingling, and suffocation roulette. At first there is light-headedness due to the reduced flow of blood and therefore oxygen to the brain. Then the rush comes on hard and strong as the pressure on the neck or chest is released and the backed up blood rushes to the brain. This deadly



game kills some students, and some students develop brain damage. Deaths from playing blackout are often reported as suicides.

Signs of blackout involvement include bloodshot eyes, marks on the neck, complaints of headaches, and unusual materials that the student did not previously have such as strings, ties, belts, and ropes with unusual knots found in the child’s bedroom and tied to furniture. School officials often have mistaken this deadly game being played in the halls as harmless horseplay. School staff that hear or see students discussing or playing blackout should refer those students to a counselor. It is important to educate parents and school personnel about this popular but dangerous trend.

Marijuana



Marijuana is one of the products of the cannabis sativa plant. Other parts of the cannabis plant produce hashish and hemp. Marijuana is smoked and sometimes cooked in food and eaten. The active ingredient, delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), is responsible for the psychoactive effects of cannabis. The THC level of today's cannabis is much stronger than that of the marijuana smoked in the 60s and 70s. Because of improved growing methods and the cross breeding of different strands of marijuana, today's pot can be up to 10 times more potent than it was in the past.

The immediate effects of THC on the central nervous system include:

- Increased heart rate
- Dry mouth
- Inhibited vomit reflex
- Red eyes
- Impaired short-term memory
- Impaired motor skills
- Decreased concentration
- Increased hunger
- Increased desire for sweets
- Sense of well-being
- Relaxation
- Vivid sense of smell, sight, taste, and hearing
- Altered thought formation and expression
- Distorted sense of time and space

Because of its organic nature, marijuana is often believed to be a safe drug. However, marijuana has many of the same harmful chemicals found in tobacco. What some people do not realize is that marijuana and THC can do long-term damage to many vital bodily functions. The user is at risk of developing cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases such as emphysema, bronchitis, heart failure, and lung cancer. THC poses a risk to the reproductive system. It lowers testosterone in men causing lower sperm count, decreased muscle mass, impotence, and gynecomastia (enlarged breast size). THC raises the testosterone level in women causing increased muscle mass, and facial hair, and interruption of the menstrual cycle. THC also suppresses the immune system. Amotivational syndrome, which looks like depression, is a psychological effect of chronic marijuana use.

For some people smoking marijuana by itself is not a strong enough feeling of euphoria. Combining substances like PCP, cocaine, methamphetamine, or embalming fluid with marijuana gives the user a different kind of high and in many cases a more dangerous high. A fast growing trend is to crush prescription medications such as Adderall, Vicodin, Percocet, or Oxycontin and add them to the joint or blunt being smoked. Some users add cocaine or other stimulants to avoid the "munchies" that THC causes.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), marijuana causes euphoria, slowed thinking and reaction time, confusion, impaired balance and coordination, chronic cough, frequent respiratory infections, impaired memory and learning, increased heart rate, anxiety, panic attacks, increased tolerance, and addiction.

Alcohol



Alcohol remains the number one drug of choice among teenagers. Actually most teenagers and some of their parents do not see alcohol as a drug. Many parents are relieved that their child is only drinking and is not taking hard core drugs. They are not aware of the serious health problems and the physical addiction associated with alcohol. Drinking alcohol begins as a curiosity among younger children. They see others drinking and wonder why it looks so fun. Often teenagers start drinking in their early teens. Most teens first try alcohol in their homes with or without parental permission. The younger teens are when they begin using alcohol, the more they put themselves at risk for addiction. The longer children delay alcohol use, the less likely they are to develop problems associated with it.

The short-term effects of drinking:

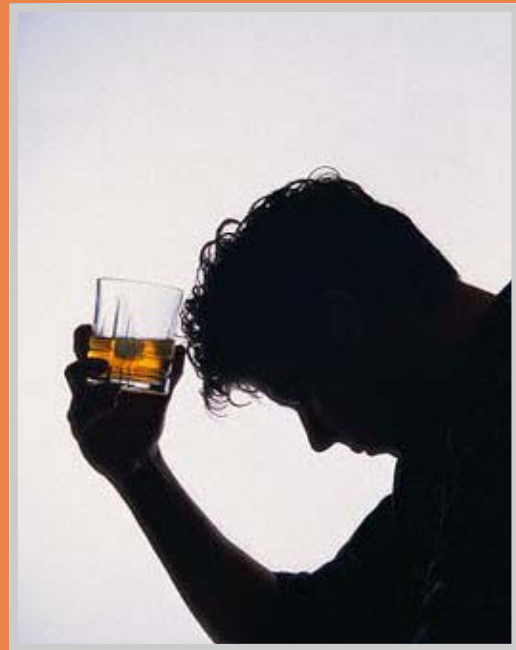
- Distorted vision, hearing, and coordination
- Altered perceptions and emotions
- Impaired judgment
- Accidents with cars, boats, and bikes and drowning
- Risky behaviors such as drug abuse and unsafe sex
- Hangovers

The long-term effects of drinking:

- Cirrhosis and cancer of the liver
- Loss of appetite
- Serious vitamin deficiencies
- Stomach ailments
- Heart and central nervous system damage
- Memory loss
- High risk of overdosing

Some common warning signs of alcohol abuse:

- Odor of alcohol
- Sudden changes in mood or attitude
- Changes in attendance or performance at school
- Loss of interest in school, sports, or other activities
- Discipline problems at school
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Taking alcohol from the home
- Depression and developmental difficulties



Experimentation with alcohol is common among teens, but it is not safe. Prevent alcohol abuse by beginning to discuss alcohol issues at an early age with your child. Keep updated on the latest trends and factual information concerning alcohol. Share this information with your child. Parents and teachers must have an ongoing dialogue with children on issues of alcohol and drug abuse.