

Effective responses to inhalant use

Inhalant use presents a number of challenges for service providers and the broader community. This fact sheet presents a summary of some of the key responses, as well as an overview of approaches that may not be effective.

Management of acute intoxication

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has published a "Clinical practice guideline for the management of volatile substance use in Australia" which is available on the NHMRC website. The following list provides a summary of key approaches to managing acute intoxication.

- Develop a system to identify young people who are using inhalants
- Remove the product from the young person
- Monitor the young person until the effects subside (usually within - 30 minutes)
- Contact emergency services, if required
- Transport the young person to a place of safety. This could include their home address, a hospital emergency department, or another agreed location where a suitable adult is able to safely monitor the young person
- Follow up with stakeholders to ensure they are aware that the young person has been found using inhalants
- Use a Police and Ambulance Intervention Plan (PAIP) to assist in communicating key information to first responders (eg current address, co-occurring health issues, agreed response plan negotiated with stakeholders)
- Regularly review the PAIP to ensure it contains up to date information

Support for families

Families of young people who are using inhalants also require support. Some services that could assist in providing information on local services include:

- Family and Child Connect (Ph: 13 32 64)
- Alcohol and Drug Information Service (Ph: 1800 177 833)

The following services provide support to parents via telephone counselling, and in some cases in-person family support groups:

- Family Drug Support (Ph: 1300 368 186)
- Parentline (Ph: 1300 301 300)

Reducing supply of inhalable products

- Inform retailers of the problem with particular products
- Offer retailers a copy of Dovetail's "A Retailer's Response to Inhalants" (order through www.inhalantsupply.org)
- Suggest retailers move products and / or increase surveillance of products that can be misused
- Make retailers aware of their legal obligations to not supply inhalants to young people who they reasonably believe will misuse the product
- Ensure contractors, builders and other legitimate users of volatile products are aware of the issues with inhalant misuse

Coordinating service delivery

The response to inhalants requires ongoing coordination and collaboration between stakeholders to ensure that it is being implemented effectively. Stakeholders who may need to be involved in the response include:

- Youth Services
- Alcohol and other drug services
- Child Safety Services
- Youth Justice Services
- Queensland Police Service
- Queensland Ambulance Service
- Emergency Departments
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services
- Justice Groups
- Elders
- Residential Care Providers
- Family Support Services
- Schools
- Local Government
- Retailers
- Other health and welfare services

Ensure the coordinated response is effective through:

- Shared case management involving all stakeholders
- Sharing information appropriately and in a timely manner
- Regularly updating and sharing case plans with all stakeholders

Approaches to avoid

- Overly punitive responses can result in young people hiding, using inhalants in more dangerous places, or displacing inhalant use to other locations
- "Sudden sniffing death" can occur when young people using inhalants undertake physical exertion, such as when they are startled, chased or when they run
- Scare tactics designed to shock young people out of using substances have been proven to be ineffective
- School-based education programs that have not been evaluated can increase intentions to use substances
- Police involvement in delivering school drug education programs should be limited
- Do not identify particular products that can be inhaled. Media reports that show or describe certain products or show methods of administering inhalants can increase interest in their use. Signage in shops notifying particular products that are inhalable can identify items young people did not already know exist

For further information and support in responding to inhalant misuse, contact Dovetail on (07) 3837 5621 or info@dovetail.org.au