



Contact: Pam McKeown
ODMHSAS Public Information
(405) 522-5102

March 10, 2004

PARENTS SHOULD WATCH FOR SIGNS OF INHALANT ABUSE

Seemingly harmless items such as bleach and nail polish remover can become deadly in the hands of a child using such chemicals to experiment with “huffing.” The biggest danger in using inhalants is that kids can die the first time, the third time or the 100th time they experiment, said Ben Brown, deputy commissioner for substance abuse services at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

The week of March 21-27 is National Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week, an annual observance designed to educate parents and others about the dangers of inhalant abuse.

“Many parents may not realize that more than 1,000 household products can be used as inhalants,” Brown said. Airplane glue, rubber cement, paint thinner, nail polish remover, bleach, kerosene, felt tip markers, butane, gasoline, spot remover, vegetable cooking spray and propane all are considered dangerous when inhaled.

“Inhalants may be the first substance a child uses – before marijuana, tobacco or alcohol,” Brown added. “National studies suggest that inhalant abuse reaches its peak at some point during the seventh through ninth grades.”

Inhalants are popular with children because they are widely available, inexpensive, easy to conceal and legal, he said.

(more)

inhalants/2

Brown said parents should be aware of symptoms of inhalant use, including chemical odors on breath or clothing; paint or other stains on the face, hands or clothes; drunk or disoriented appearance; slurred speech; inattentiveness; lack of coordination; hidden empty spray paint or solvent containers; and chemical-soaked rags or clothing.

Inhalant use can cause a number of health problems, including suffocation. Short-term health problems include heart palpitations, breathing difficulty, dizziness and headaches. Long-term symptoms involve damage to the brain, nerve cells, heart and lungs.

Parents can influence their children's choices by paying attention and communicating, Brown said. Other tips include the following:

? Be absolutely clear with your children that you don't want them to use inhalants or other drugs. Don't leave room for interpretation. Talk often – more than once or twice a year – about the dangers of drug and alcohol use.

? Don't react in a way that will cut off further discussion. If your child says things that challenge or shock you, respond with a calm discussion of why people use drugs and whether doing so is worth the risk.

? Be involved in your child's life. Always know where your children are and what they're doing. Get to know your child's friends and their parents.

? Eat dinner with your children as frequently as possible, and attend religious services as a family. Find some time to spend with your child.

For more information about inhalants, visit the National Inhalants and Poisons
Awareness Week website at www.inhalants.org.

#