

# Inhalants the Top Drug of Abuse for 12-Year-Olds

BY ALICIA AULT

WASHINGTON — New federal data show that, among 12-year-olds, inhalants are the most abused drug, exceeding abuse of marijuana, cocaine, and hallucinogens combined.

From 2006 to 2008, almost 7% of 12-year-olds said that they had used an inhalant to get high, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). That compares with a life-



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time use rate of 5% for prescription drugs and 1.4% for marijuana. Alcohol remains the most abused substance overall among 12-year-olds.

Officials from SAMHSA, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition, and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy gathered in Washington to discuss the inhalant use data, and to urge parents and physicians to educate children about the dangers of “huffing.”

Although federal statistics show a decline over the last decade in the numbers of people first using inhalants, the numbers are still large: 729,000 Americans tried inhalants in 2008, with 489,000 of them in the 12- to-17-year-old age group. That’s down from 821,000 total in 1998, but up slightly from 455,000 in 1998 in the younger age group. Officials also said they are concerned that from 2007 to 2008, fewer eighth graders perceived inhalant use as harmful in the Monitoring the Future Survey conducted for NIDA.

Usually, a decline in risk perception is followed by an uptick in usage, officials said at the briefing.

Inhalant use is largely a phenomenon among whites, but large numbers of Hispanic and African Americans also abuse the chemicals. The mean age for first-time inhalant use is 16—a year younger than for any other illicit substance, according to SAMHSA.

SAMHSA Administrator Pamela Hyde said inhalant use often precedes a move to other drugs. And, according to Ashley Upchurch, a 17-year-old recovering inhalant addict who spoke at the briefing,

inhalants often are used to enhance the high from other drugs or alcohol.

Inhalants are easy to obtain and can often be abused without detection.

The chemicals can be found in household cleaners, paint thinner, fabric protector, magic markers, glue, hairspray, nail polish remover, and dessert topping sprays, among a myriad of other products. For Ms. Upchurch, the inhalant of choice was a pressurized can used to

force dust out of computer keyboards and other electronics.

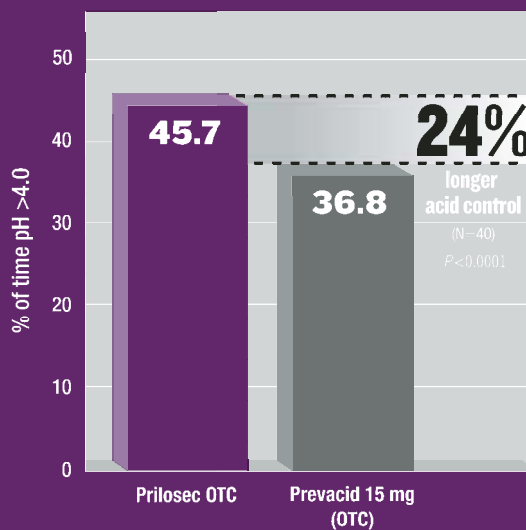
The chemicals can lead to short-term memory loss, emotional instability, problems with gait and speech, and over the long term, more permanent neurologic and cardiac symptoms. “As risky as inhalants are, many kids don’t see the drugs that way,” said Dr. Timothy Condon, deputy director of NIDA. Dr. Condon said warnings about huffing dan-

gers weren’t “hype,” adding that “inhalants can be deadly.”

Dr. Jennifer N. Caudle, director of the family medicine section at Sinai Hospital, Baltimore, said there was a phenomenon called sudden sniffing death, in which the inhaler dies from cardiac arrest. Dr. Caudle and her colleagues at the American Osteopathic Association are joining with the Inhalant Prevention Coalition to publicize huffing dangers. ■

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