

A Retailer's Response to Inhalants

Discover essential insights on inhalants and get practical advice to empower your business and support your community.



Amity
Community Services Inc



NT Health

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Dear Retailer,

Re: Responsible supply of high risk substances

Department of Health (NT Health) is seeking your assistance in managing the supply of common high-risk volatile products that some people are unsafely using to produce a high or feel intoxicated.

The most common products used, predominately by young people, are aerosol deodorants and dry shampoos. Young people generally inhale these substances through cloth to catch the liquid or dry chemicals, allowing the propellant to pass through. Other volatile substances such as glues and correction fluid may also be inhaled or targeted. Within minutes, the user experiences intoxication, with symptoms similar to those caused by drinking alcohol.

Unfortunately, people are also drinking substances such as mouthwash and hand sanitisers to become intoxicated.

These practices are unsafe, may cause serious harm and can lead to death.

Reducing access to and the supply of high-risk products is a key part of NT Health's management strategy and retailers are strongly encouraged to manage high-risk products effectively.

Some of the actions retailers can take include:

- placing targeted high-risk products in locked cabinets or behind counters
- providing education to staff around methods for refusing suspect sales

Evidence suggests that these products are often stolen rather than purchased, and therefore securing products can result in positive economic benefit for stores.

Any efforts you can make to restrict access and supply of high-risk products would be appreciated. For further information please contact, Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch (MHAODB) on 8999 2691 or MHAOD.Health@nt.gov.au

Yours sincerely

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name of the Executive Director.

Executive Director

Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch

Pharmacies

- Deodorant
- Dry Shampoo
- Coloured Hairspray
- Hairspray
- Eucalyptus Spray
- Insect Repellents

NB: Travel items are also a risk.



Supermarkets

- Deodorant
- Dry Shampoo/Hairspray
- Cooking Oil Spray
- Cleaning Aerosols
- Insect Repellents
- Insect Killers

NB: Travel items are also a risk.



Volatile Substance Products

These are some examples of Volatile Substances that can be purchased in our community



Hardware Stores

- Butane
- Cleaning Products
- Insect Killer/Repellents
- Lighter Fluid
- Glue/Adhesives
- Petrol
- Spray Paint



Corner Shops

- Deodorant
- Hairspray
- Cooking Oil Spray
- Insect Repellents
- Lighter Fluid

NB: Travel items are also a risk.

Types of Volatile Substances

Category	Inhalant	Chemical
Aerosols	○ Hair sprays	○ butane, propane
	○ Deodorants	○ butane, propane
	○ Spray paints	○ butane, propane, fluorocarbons, toluene, trichloroethylene
	○ Fabric protector sprays	○ butane, trichloroethylene
	○ Computer cleaners	○ dimethyl ether, butane, propane, n-hexane
	○ Asthma puffers	○ chlorofluorocarbons
Solvents	○ nail polish removers	○ acetone, ethyl acetate, toluene
	○ paint remover / thinners	○ toluene, methylene chloride, methanol, acetone, ethyl acetate, xylene, trichloroethylene, petroleum, distillates
	○ permanent marker pens	○ xylene
	○ petrol	○ benzene, toluene, n-hexane, xylene, possibly lead
Gases	○ fuel gas	○ butane, propane
	○ cigarette lighter fuel	○ butane, propane
	○ refrigerant	○ freon
Nitrates	○ poppers, fluids, room deodorisers	○ amyl nitrate, butyl nitrite, cyclohexyl nitrite
Anesthetics	○ gaseous	○ nitrous oxide
	○ liquid	○ halothane, enflurane
	○ local	○ ethyl chloride
Cleaning agents	○ dry cleaners	○ tetrachloroethylene, trichloroethane, n-hexane
	○ spot removers	○ xylene, petroleum distillates, chlorohydrocarbons
	○ degreasers	○ tetrachloroethylene
Food products	○ whipped cream aerosols (whippets)	○ nitrous oxide

Responsible Sale of Volatile Substance

Retailer legal rights and responsibilities under the Northern Territory Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act 2005 (VSAP Act)

- It is not an offence to misuse volatile substances.
- The VSAP Act does include as an offence 'supplying volatile substances to another person if it will be used for inhalation'.
- Under the VSAP Act, a person (or retailer) must not supply a volatile substance to a second person if the first person knows or ought to know the second person intends:
 1. to inhale the volatile substance; or
 2. to supply the volatile substance to a third person for inhalation by the third person or any other person.

What does this mean for you, the retailer?

- The VSAP Act puts the responsibility onto the retailer to decide if the purchaser may be intending to inhale the product or sell/supply to someone else. You have the right to refuse sale on this basis.
- Additionally, retailers have the right to withdraw particular items from sale, move products to another area or encase products in cages.

Can retailers be prosecuted for refusing to sell volatile substances?

- No. Retailers and staff are protected if refusal to sell is based on the knowledge or suspicion that the person may use the volatile substance to inhale, or may sell or supply another person to inhale.

What about anti-discrimination?

- As above, retailers are protected, as long as refusal to sell is related to the belief or suspicion that the person may use the volatile substance to inhale or may sell or supply another person to inhale.
- Any questions asked of customer must relate to establishing legitimate purpose of purchased, and not be discriminatory based on age, race or sex.



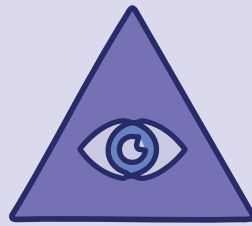
We encourage all retailers to contact the police on 131 444 to report concerns of Volatile Substance Use or call Amity on 08 8944 6565.

Tips for Effective Aerosol Management



Locked Cabinet

A locked cabinet or cage is an effective form of aerosol management. It allows retailers to keep their products on show, while ensuring that they cannot be stolen. It also enables staff to monitor the sales of high-risk products.



Out of Sight

Keeping high-risk products out of sight (under the counter or in a store room), especially those that are in high demand, can relieve pressure on retailers even for short period of time.



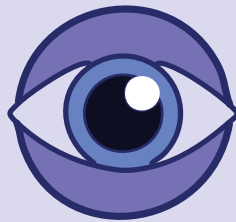
Dummy Cards

These laminated pictures of products are placed on the shelf to substitute products locked up or kept out of sight.



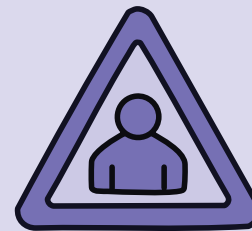
Sales Record Form

Recording any large or unusual sales helps drive the safe supply of aerosols, information recorded can also be used as evidence in police investigations to help prosecute people who are thought to be on-selling or otherwise supplying products for purpose of intoxication.



Display Placement

Ensuring that products that cannot be caged are placed within sight of counter staff, means high-risk products are under constant surveillance. This makes shoplifting more difficult.



Staff Awareness

Training sessions for staff on effective management of aerosols and other inhalants can be organised during staff meetings or other times of convenience.

Contacts

Top End:

Amity Community Services
(08) 8944 6565
www.amity.org.au

Central Australia:

Central Australia Youth Link-Up Service (CAYLUS)
(08) 8951 4236
www.caylus.org.au

What are volatile substances?

Volatile substances include petrol, solvents and aerosols that when inhaled can cause significant side effects, as well as damage to the brain.

Why do people use volatile substances?

Most people use volatile substances for similar reasons to alcohol or other drugs. However, volatile substances may be particularly attractive to some people because they are cheap, easily accessible, legal and provide a quick intoxication.

Responding to theft

If someone has used inhalants, do not chase them as they can have a heart attack, even young people. Call emergency services if needed. Never jeopardise your own safety.

Loss Prevention

Retailers should move products and / or increase surveillance of products that can be misused.

Legislation

"The Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act 2005 (the Act) provides a comprehensive and systematic approach for prevention and treatment of volatile substance use in the Northern Territory."



Effective Responses to Inhalant Use

Inhalant use can present challenges for service providers and the broader community. This information sheet presents a summary of key responses to inhalant use at both individual and community levels. It also highlights approaches to avoid.

Responding to inhalant intoxication

Intoxication is short acting. Once a person stops inhaling, they should start recovering from the effects within 15 minutes, or up to 30 minutes in cases of heavy use.

Safety first

Consider the person, yourself, and other people around you. Assess the physical and social environment for risks before assisting the person using inhalants.

Approach slowly

Stand close by initially; give the person time to know you're there. Move slowly and speak calmly when approaching. Note that the person may be too intoxicated to speak.

Avoid forcing, arguing, or chasing

This can cause more harm and be dangerous for their heart. If a person becomes agitated, use standard de-escalation strategies.

Ventilate the space

Inhalants are flammable; have doors and windows opened if inside. Ensure things that may ignite the fumes, like cigarette lighters, are removed.

Monitor intoxication

Ask the person to put down the product. If they are no longer actively using the inhalant, are they recovering from the effects? Decide how long you'll monitor if the person continues to use inhalants and consider what options you have.

Check for other medical issues or injuries

The person might be using other substances too. Other conditions may include head injury, infections, sprains or poisoning due to their chemicals/drugs/snakebites.

Ask how they are

Are they physically and emotionally okay? Ask what would make them feel more comfortable and if there is a parent, carer, or other responsible adult who you could contact.

Help as required

If the person does not recover as expected (approx. 15-30 minutes), or if symptoms worsen, airway becomes compromised, person has a seizure, is unconscious, or a worker is not confident with the situation – call Triple Zero ("000").

After someone has recovered from intoxication

Safe space

Encourage the person to sit in a quiet, safe space. This may require transportation to a suitable place with appropriate adult supervision.

Ask how they are

Are they physically and emotionally ok? Ask what would make them feel more comfortable and if you could contact a support person.

Monitor the person closely

Make sure they continue to recover from the effects within the expected timeframe.

Offer water then food

Offer water and, if they're able to swallow, some soft food (e.g breakfast cereal or yogurt) that is easy to eat.

Change clothing if required

If the inhalant has contaminated the person's clothing, it could be flammable. Offer a change of clothes.

Identify family or a responsible adult

Once the person has recovered from the effects of inhalants, support the person to return to the care of their family, carer, or another responsible adult.

Coordinated community responses including shared case management with young people

High levels of inhalant use often occurs in cycles and amongst groups of young people in suburbs, towns or regions. In these cases, coordinated community responses alongside multi-agency case management for individual young people has been shown to be effective.

This includes three elements:

Harm reduction

When young people continue to use despite our best efforts, approaches aimed at reducing harms are recommended. Develop a system to identify young people who are using inhalants for shared case management among service providers. Consider running outreach services at times and places where inhalant use occurs (often after hours), respond to intoxication, provide aftercare, transport to places of safety, teach young people about the recovery position and when to call an ambulance ('you won't get in trouble').

It is recommended that young people who frequently engage with emergency and other services have a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive response plan developed in collaboration with them. With their consent, this plan should be shared with key stakeholders and may include relevant details such as their current address and key support contacts.

Demand reduction

Demand reduction strategies are activities and approaches that make young people not want to use inhalants. This can be through the provision of structured activities or cultural programs that change the focus for young people away from the places and time they would normally use inhalants. Other examples of demand reduction include drug education and engaging peer group leaders. Importantly, understanding the underlying reasons a person uses inhalants and supporting healthier alternatives will produce the best outcomes.

Supply reduction

Identify the products being used and find out where young people are accessing them. We can then work with retailers to reduce access by moving products to enable increased monitoring. Be cautious not to inadvertently identify products as inhalable where young people may not already know about those products and watch for displacement to other inhalants if supply is restricted. Dovetail has a useful resource that can assist:

[A Retailer's Response to Inhalants | Dovetail](#)

In remote communities that experience high rates of petrol sniffing, low aromatic fuel (sometimes known by brand name like "Opal Fuel") can be introduced in place of regular unleaded fuel. For information:

[Low aromatic unleaded fuel: The facts | NIAA](#)

Approaches to avoid

- Overly punitive responses can result in young people hiding, using inhalants in more dangerous places, or shifting inhalant use to other locations.
- Sudden sniffing death can occur when young people using inhalants undertake physical exertion, such as when they are startled 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 avoided.
- Media reports that show or describe products or show methods of administering inhalants can increase interest in using inhalants.
- Signage in shops that identifies particular products as inhalable can identify products young people did not already know exist.



For further resources on responding to people using inhalants visit the [Dovetail Inhalant Toolkit](#), for contact Dovetail (in Queensland).

Volatile Substance Use: Harms to the Body

Central Nervous System

Damage to the myelin sheathing.

Brain

Headaches, seizures, delirium, brain damage, coma.

Heart

Abnormal heart rhythm, sudden death, cardiac arrest, heart damage.

Hypoxia

A condition in which the body is deprived of adequate oxygen supply.

Lungs

Pneumonia from inhaling vomit, breathing difficulties, asphyxiation (if using a bag), lung damage.

Stomach

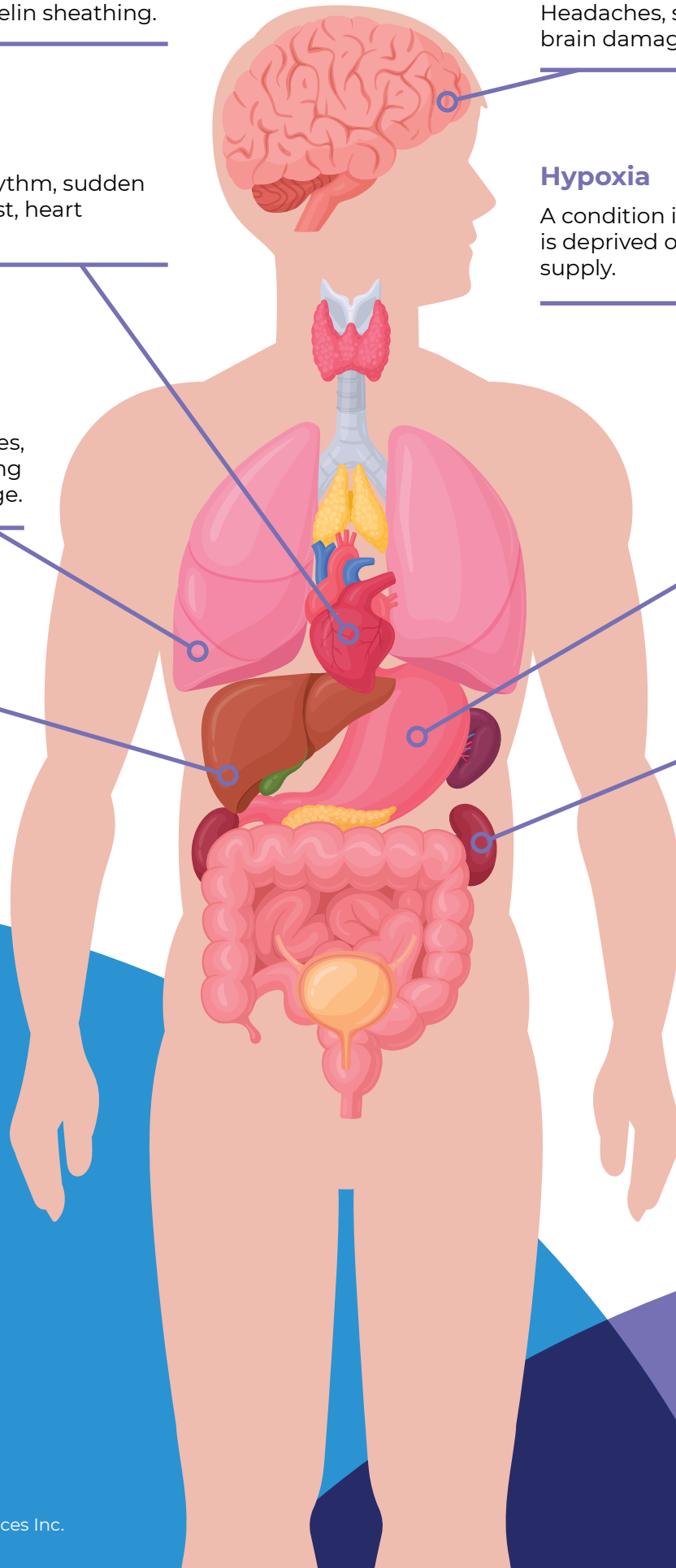
Loss of appetite, nausea, stomach ulcers.

Liver

Liver damage.

Kidneys

Kidney damage.



Effects of Inhalant Use

Inhalants affect everyone differently based on:

- Size and weight of person
- The persons general health
- Whether the person has a tolerance to the substance
- Whether other drugs or alcohol have been consumed
- Amount of physical activity before and after inhaling
- The amount of fresh air and substance inhaled

Sniffing can cause:

- Intoxication
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Delirium
- Seizures
- Pneumonia from inhaling vomit
- Dependence
- Brain damage
- Coma
- Abnormal heart rhythm
- Sudden death
- Asphyxiation

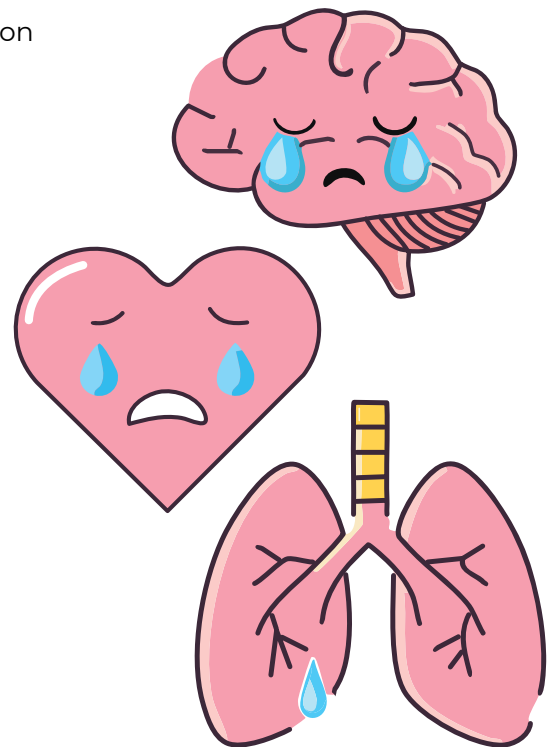
Volatile Substance Use Retailer Information Session

VSU information session for retail staff – 45-60 minutes

The presentation covers the following topics:

- Understanding volatile substances
- Risks and Dangers
- Prevention and awareness
- Effective communication and de-escalation techniques
- Safety measures and protocols

To book a session, contact Amity on the above details or via the website www.amity.org.au/information-session



Source: Australian Drug Foundation, www.adf.org.au

For more information contact the following services:

Amity Community Services

☎ 08 8944 6565
✉ habitwise@amity.org.au

NT Health – MHAOD Branch

☎ 08 8999 2691
✉ MHAOD.Health@nt.gov.au

Volatile Substance Team

☎ 08 8944 8288
✉ VSA.TEHS@nt.gov.au

CAYLUS – Central Australia

☎ 08 8951 5236
✉ caylus@caylus.org.au

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An Australian Government Initiative

RURAL
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