



Gas,” and may contain artificial flavors to make them more attractive to adolescents and young adults and more likely to be misused.<sup>13</sup>

## DANGERS AND PREVALENCE OF INHALANT USE

Risks of long-term inhalant use include weight loss, muscle weakness, disorientation, irritability, and depression, while chronic use may cause “serious and sometimes irreversible damage to the user’s heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, and brain.”<sup>14</sup> Long-term use is also “strongly associated with prevalence of personality, mood, and anxiety disorders, including major depression.”<sup>15</sup> Further, as with licit and illicit controlled substances, a single use can result in death – “sudden sniffing death (SSD) may result within minutes of inhalant abuse from irregular heart rhythm leading to heart failure.”<sup>16</sup> Other side effects of inhalant use include nausea, vomiting, slurred speech, and drowsiness.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the deleterious effects associated with inhalant use during pregnancy include cleft palate, hearing loss, and developmental delays in the child.<sup>18</sup> Individuals who use inhalants regularly can experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop use.<sup>19</sup>

According to the most recent survey on drug use conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, nearly 32 million people aged 12 and older reported using inhalants at least once in their lifetime.<sup>20</sup> The majority of those individuals – 14.5 million – reported using nitrous oxide, also known as “whippits,” while amyl nitrite, “poppers,” locker room odorizers, or “rush”<sup>21</sup> accounted for 10 million respondents.<sup>22</sup> Other inhalants reported as being abused include correction fluid, degreaser, or cleaning fluid; gasoline or lighter fluid; anesthetics; lacquer thinner and other paint solvents; spray paints; and computer cleaner/air dusters.<sup>23</sup>



According to NIDA, adolescents are most likely to use inhalants.<sup>24</sup> Inhalants appeal to young people because they are easy to find, being legally sold in convenience stores, hardware stores, gas stations, grocery stores, and online and, as a result of their ready availability, inhalants give the appearance of being safe.<sup>25</sup> Inhalants also work quickly and are used in social media “challenges,” where they are portrayed as fun to use.<sup>26</sup> Eighteen states prohibit the sale of certain products, primarily glue and items containing nitrous oxide, to anyone under a certain age (typically 18, although Illinois prohibits sales to children under the age of 17; New Jersey prohibits sales to individuals under the age of 19; and Louisiana, Minnesota, New York, and Wisconsin prohibit sales to individuals under the age of 21).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See *FDA Advises Consumers Not to Inhale Nitrous Oxide Products*, U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMIN. (June 4, 2025), <https://www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/fda-advises-consumers-not-inhale-nitrous-oxide-products>.

<sup>14</sup> *Inhalants Fast Facts*, *supra* note 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Inhalants*, *supra* note 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Inhalants Fast Facts*, *supra* note 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Inhalants*, *supra* note 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUM. SERVS., SUBSTANCE ABUSE & MENTAL HEALTH SERVS. ADMIN., Table 1.108A (July 2025), [Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#).

<sup>21</sup> “Rush” is a slang term for amyl nitrites.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUM. SERVS., *supra* note 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Inhalants*, *supra* note 1.

<sup>25</sup> Pat Aussem, *Huffing & Dusting: Signs of Inhalant Misuse Parents Should Know*, PARTNERSHIP TO END ADDICTION (July 2025), [Huffing & Dusting: Signs of Inhalant Misuse Parents Should Know - Partnership to End Addiction](#).

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> See *Inhalants: Summary of State Laws*, LEGIS. ANALYSIS & PUB. POL’Y ASS’N (Apr. 9, 2026), [Inhalants: Summary of State Laws | LAPPA](#).

The Partnership to End Addiction (Partnership) provides a list of warning signs of which parents should be aware if they suspect that their child is using inhalants.<sup>28</sup> These include: (1) a chemical smell on their breath or clothing; (2) spots or sores around their mouth; (3) paint stains on their hands, face, or clothing; (4) appearing intoxicated without the smell of alcohol; and (5) sudden mood swings.<sup>29</sup> The Partnership also recommends that parents look for empty spray cans or bottles, missing household products, and rags or clothing that smell like chemicals.<sup>30</sup>

## REGULATION OF INHALANTS

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Forty-seven states, the District of Columbia, and Guam criminalize the possession and/or use of inhalants for the purpose of inducing a condition of intoxication, inebriation, exhilaration, stupefaction, or lethargy, with penalties ranging from low-level misdemeanors to low-level felonies, usually for repeat violations.<sup>31</sup>

The majority of states (36) and the District of Columbia also criminalize the sale, purchase, transfer, or distribution of certain inhalants. In most cases, these statutes are related to the sale, transfer, or distribution of inhalants when the person selling, transferring, or distributing the substance knew or should have known that the individual was going to use the substance for the purpose of inducing a condition of intoxication, inebriation, exhilaration, stupefaction, or lethargy, or for the purpose of dulling the brain or nervous system; or for selling, transferring, or distributing the substance to minors (people under a specified age).<sup>32</sup> The 14 states without such laws are: Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the age-related criminal penalties, 18 states, the District of Columbia, and Guam have statutes that restrict the purchase of certain substances (primarily nitrous oxide) by individuals under the age of 17 (Illinois); 18 (Arizona, California, Connecticut, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio (for harmful intoxicants), Oregon, and Texas); 19 (New Jersey); or 21 (Louisiana, Minnesota, New York, Ohio (for nitrous oxide), and Wisconsin).<sup>34</sup>

Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Texas, Wisconsin, the District of Columbia, and the federal government also place additional regulations or restrictions on the sale or purchase of certain inhalants.<sup>35</sup> These provisions generally require that sellers maintain a log of purchases that is to be kept for a specified period of time and open for inspection by federal or state officials.<sup>36</sup>

In recent months, states have taken additional measures to restrict access to certain inhalants, primarily nitrous oxide cartridges or canisters. For example, Tennessee recently passed S.B. 1843 that makes it illegal for vape shops and distributors, wholesalers, and importers of vape products, to sell nitrous oxide in the state and provides that a violation will subject the violator to a civil penalty.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Washington State enacted H.B. 2532 which makes it a gross misdemeanor for any person, with certain exceptions, to sell, furnish, administer, distribute, give away, or offer to sell, furnish, administer, distribute, or give away a device, canister, tank, or receptacle that either exclusively contains nitrous oxide or flavored nitrous oxide, or exclusively contains a chemical compound mixed with nitrous oxide.<sup>38</sup> Another example comes from a bill pending in Florida which, if enacted, would make it a

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<sup>28</sup> AUSSEM, *supra* note 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Inhalants: Summary of State Laws*, *supra* note 27. Alaska, Connecticut, and Michigan are the three states without criminal penalties related to the possession and/or use of inhalants.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> S.B. 1843, 114<sup>th</sup> Gen. Assemb. (Tenn. 2026).

<sup>38</sup> H.B. 2532, Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2026). Exceptions include the sale or use of nitrous oxide: (1) for medical, dental, and veterinary uses; (2) for use in food products; (3) by a manufacturer as part of a manufacturing process or industrial operation; (4) a person lawfully engaged in distributing nitrous oxide for medical, dental, or veterinary purposes; or (5) for automotive purposes.

third degree felony for any dealer licensed or permitted pursuant to state law to possess, sell, possess with intent to sell, deliver, or give, directly or indirectly, nitrous oxide on or from the dealer’s licensed premises.<sup>39</sup> The bill provides certain exceptions for grocery stores and supermarkets, but specifically notes that it applies to convenience stores.<sup>40</sup> These and similar bills in a few states across the country illustrate the seriousness with which state legislators are taking the risks associated with inhalant use.

## CONCLUSION

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Although laws exist nationwide that restrict the sale, use, possession, or distribution of certain inhalants, it is extremely difficult to regulate all of the substances classified as inhalants because of their use in common, everyday household products. Therefore, educating the public, particularly adolescents and young adults, regarding the dangers of inhalants is an important component of reducing inhalant use. Currently, only 28 states, Guam, and the federal government have laws or rules with specific education, prevention, or treatment provisions related to inhalants.<sup>41</sup> In addition to education and prevention measures, placing restrictions on who can lawfully sell certain products, such as nitrous oxide canisters and cartridges, can reduce access to those products and potentially reverse the rise in nitrous oxide use among adolescents and young adults.

## RESOURCES

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<sup>39</sup> S.B. 432, Reg. Sess. (Fla. 2026).

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Inhalants: Summary of State Laws*, *supra* note 27.

## ABOUT THE LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS AND PUBLIC POLICY ASSOCIATION

The Legislative Analysis and Public Policy Association (LAPPA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to conduct legal and legislative research and analysis and draft legislation on effective law and policy in the areas of public safety and health, substance use disorder, and the criminal justice system.

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