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## **CAMPAIGN AIMS TO REDUCE INHALANT ABUSE AMONG VIRGINIA'S MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS**

*March 18-24 is National Poison Prevention Week*

(RICHMOND, Va.) – Beginning this week, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will launch a statewide campaign to educate parents of middle school-aged children about the health risks and warning signs of inhalant abuse and how to prevent it. The 2005 Virginia Community Youth Survey conducted for the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services indicated that eight percent of the 4,704 eighth graders surveyed reported using inhalants within the past 30 days, almost double the national rate.

“Inhalant abuse can cause irreversible brain and lung damage, vision and hearing loss and devastating injury,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “Inhalant abuse is an often overlooked form of substance abuse, but is no less dangerous than abusing drugs or alcohol.”

VDH has distributed 300 Inhalant Abuse Prevention Kits to schools to use in raising awareness of the problem among parents. The kits contain educational information in print and video formats. The department also has distributed \$61,000 in mini grants to several middle schools, Safe Kids coalitions and Poison Control Centers to conduct parent education projects in their communities.

“Studies show that nine out of 10 parents are unaware that their children may be abusing inhalants,” said Lenny Recupero, community injury prevention coordinator in VDH’s Division of Injury and Violence Prevention. “Intentionally inhaling the chemicals found in many aerosols, solvents and food products even once could cause serious long-term health problems and death.”

One Virginia mother discovered her son’s inhalant use when she found that the can of whipped cream she had recently purchased was empty. Thinking the product was defective; she took it back to the store and got another. When that one turned up empty too, she began asking questions and learned that her son had been sniffing the nitrous oxide contained in the can to get high. Nitrous oxide is often called laughing gas.

Spray paint, nail polish remover and hair spray are among the more than 1,400 readily accessible household products that children may use to get high.

Recupero urges parents to learn about inhalants before their children do. “Learn what to look for if you suspect that your child is abusing inhalants. Talk to your children about inhalants when you discuss smoking, alcohol and drug abuse. Start these discussions early,” he said.

(more)

VDH recommends the following tips to help prevent inhalant abuse:

- Be aware of the signs of use: paint or stains on the body or clothing, loss of appetite or nausea, a chemical breath odor, spots or sores around the mouth and nose, red or runny eyes or nose, anxiety or a drunk or dazed appearance.
- Know what items in your home could be used as an inhalant and monitor their use.
- It is never too early to teach children about the dangers of inhalant use.

If you find your child unconscious or you suspect your child is under the influence of an inhalant:

- Call 911 immediately.
- Keep your child calm to reduce cardiac stress
- Try to determine the source of the inhalant so the medical professionals can help more quickly.
- If you suspect your child or someone you know might be abusing inhalants, call your Poison Control Center immediately at (800) 222-1222.

For more information on inhalant abuse, visit the Virginia Department of Health's Web site [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov) and find "Inhalant Abuse" in the A-Z index. Parents can take a 20-minute interactive training by going to [www.inhalantabusetraining.org](http://www.inhalantabusetraining.org) and clicking on "Virginia Parent Training."

Other resources include the Alliance for Consumer Education at [www.inhalant.org](http://www.inhalant.org); the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition at [www.inhalants.org](http://www.inhalants.org), or your local Poison Control Center at (800) 222-1222. The 2005 Virginia Community Youth Survey can be found online at [www.dmhmrzas.virginia.gov/documents/reports/osas-communityyouthsurvey2005.pdf](http://www.dmhmrzas.virginia.gov/documents/reports/osas-communityyouthsurvey2005.pdf).

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