

14 Inhalants

Introduction

This chapter presents data on the use of volatile substances such as solvents, aerosols, glue and petrol used as inhalants.

The average age at which Australians used inhalants for the first time was 17.6 years, the youngest age compared with the other illicit drugs in the survey.

Use of inhalants

In 2001, fewer than half a million (415,500) Australians aged 14 years and over had used inhalants in their lifetime (Table 14.1). Other aspects of overall use are:

- About 70,000 (0.4%) Australians aged 14 years and over had used inhalants in the last 12 months.
- Those in the 20–29 years age group were more likely than those in the other age groups to have used inhalants.
- Males were more likely than females to have used inhalants.

Table 14.1: Inhalant use, persons aged 14 years and over, by age, by sex, Australia, 2001

Period	Age group				Sex		Persons
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	Males	Females	
	(per cent)						
In lifetime	2.9	7.0	3.6	0.8	3.3	2.0	2.6
In the last 12 months	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.1	0.6	0.3	0.4
In the last month	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.2
In the last week	0.1 *	0.3	–	–	0.1	–	0.1
	(number)						
In lifetime	45,100	214,900	104,500	67,400	253,500	162,200	415,500
In the last 12 months	15,500	30,300	14,300	9,300	44,900	23,400	68,200
In the last month	6,600	10,300	3,800	5,000	20,000	5,500	25,500
In the last week	1,800 *	7,900	–	–	10,100	–	12,600

Note: Totals may not equal sum due to rounding.

Frequency of use of inhalants

The frequency at which the 68,200 recent users of inhalants used this drug varied by age group and sex (Table 14.2):

- Male recent users (50.8%) were more likely than female recent users (41.4%) to use inhalants three or more times a year.
- Inhalants were not used daily by recent users. About half (52.3%) of recent users used inhalants once or twice a year.

Table 14.2: Frequency of inhalants use, recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, by sex, Australia, 2001

Frequency	Age group				Sex		Persons
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	Males	Females	
	(per cent)						
Three or more times a year	52.5	48.2	25.9 *	94.1	50.8	41.1	47.7
Once or twice a year	47.5	51.8	74.1	5.9 *	49.2	58.9	52.3
	(number)						
Three or more times a year	8,100	14,600	3,700 *	8,700	22,800	9,600	32,400
Once or twice a year	7,300	15,700	10,600	500 *	22,100	13,800	35,900

Note: Base equals recent users.

Source of supply and quantity of inhalants used

Recent users of inhalants were asked to indicate where they usually obtained this drug (Table 14.3):

- Three in five (61.4%) recent users of inhalants usually obtained these substances from a friend or acquaintance.
- About one in five (18.6%) recent users bought inhalants from a shop.

Table 14.3: Usual source for obtaining inhalants, recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001

Source	Males	Females	Persons
	(per cent)		
Friend or acquaintance	72.0	50.2	61.4
Relative	–	7.3 *	3.6 *
Dealer	–	1.5 *	0.7 *
Buy at shop	18.4	18.9 *	18.6
Other	9.6 *	22.1	15.7

Notes

1. Base equals recent users.
2. Respondents were asked to select one response only.

- On a day they used inhalants, recent users typically had on average only one hit.

Usual place of use of inhalants

Recent users of inhalants were asked the locations they usually used inhalants (Table 14.4):

- Three-quarters (74.5%) of recent users of inhalants used in their own home or at a friend's house.
- One in five recent users of inhalants used at private parties (26.6%) and at raves/dance parties (26.0%).

Table 14.4: Usual place of use of inhalants, recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001

Location	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
In a home	71.4	82.9	74.5
At private parties	29.3	19.1	26.6
At raves/dance parties	26.4	25.0	26.0
At public establishments	12.5 *	6.4 *	10.9
At work or school/TAFE/university, etc.	9.3 *	19.7	12.1
In public places (e.g. parks)	9.9 *	7.9 *	9.4
In a car or other vehicle	4.1 *	11.1 *	5.9 *
Somewhere else	4.5 *	1.0 *	3.6 *

Notes

1. Base equals recent users.
2. Respondents could select more than one response.

Concurrent drug use with inhalants

Recent users of inhalants were asked if any other drugs were used (on at least one occasion) at the same time as inhalants (Table 14.5):

- Recent users of inhalants had most commonly used alcohol at the same time as inhalants (45.5%).
- Two in five (40.5%) recent users had used marijuana/cannabis at the same time as inhalants.
- One-third (36.4%) of recent users of inhalants had not used another drug at the same time as inhalants.

Table 14.5: Other drugs used with inhalants, recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001

Drug	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Alcohol	51.6	32.5	45.5
Marijuana/cannabis	44.5	32.0	40.5
Heroin	–	–	–
Cocaine	11.9	3.0 *	9.0
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(a)	7.1 *	–	4.8 *
Anti-depressants ^(a)	4.1 *	1.1 *	3.1 *
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(a)	0.8 *	0.9 *	0.8 *
Barbiturates ^(a)	1.6 *	–	1.1 *
Amphetamines/speed ^(a)	30.1	21.0	27.2
Ecstasy/designer drugs	33.5	13.8 *	27.1
Other	1.0 *	7.7 *	3.1 *
None of the above	33.8	41.8	36.4

(a) Used for non-medical purposes.

Notes

1. Base equals recent users.
2. Respondents could select more than one response.

Substitution of other drugs for inhalants

Recent users of inhalants were asked if they used another drug when inhalants were not available (Table 14.6):

- When inhalants were not available, 20.3% of recent users substituted alcohol for inhalants.
- More than half (56.6%) of recent users did not use another drug when inhalants were not available.

Table 14.6: Other drugs used to substitute for inhalants when inhalants not available, recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001

Drug	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Alcohol	19.2	22.5	20.3
Marijuana/cannabis	15.0	10.0	13.3
Heroin	0.4 *	–	0.3 *
Cocaine	–	–	–
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(a)	–	–	–
Anti-depressants ^(a)	–	–	–
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(a)	–	–	–
Barbiturates ^(a)	–	–	–
Amphetamines/speed ^(a)	2.9	7.8 *	4.6
Ecstasy/designer drugs	6.0	0.9 *	4.3
Other	–	1.7 *	0.6 *
None	56.4	57.1	56.6

(a) Used for non-medical purposes.

Notes

1. Base equals recent users.
2. Respondents were asked to select one response only.

Inhalants use by friends and acquaintances

All respondents were asked what proportion of their friends and acquaintances used inhalants. The proportions varied with the respondent's history of use (Table 14.7):

- Among people who had never used inhalants, 97.9% had no friends and acquaintances who had used inhalants, compared with 64.7% among those who had used in their lifetime.
- One-third (34.4%) of those who had used inhalants in their lifetime reported that up to half of their friends and acquaintances used inhalants.
- Among recent users, 4.9%* reported that all or most of their friends and acquaintances used inhalants.

Table 14.7: Inhalants use by friends and acquaintances, persons aged 14 years and over, by use status, Australia, 2001

Proportion of friends	Use status		
	Never use	Ever use (per cent)	Recent use
All or most	0.1	0.9 *	4.9 *
About half or less	2.1	34.4	69.2
None	97.9	64.7	25.9