



COMMUNITY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
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Public Health Advisory - “Whip-It’s” Nitrous Oxide (N₂O) Usage

Summary

There has been an increase in empty “whip-it” canisters found around the Tulalip Health Clinic. A “whip-it” (pictured below), is a steel cylinder filled with nitrous oxide. When inhaled it can create a euphoric and relaxed feeling. However, death or irreversible brain damage can occur from lack of oxygen.

Background

In February 2017, and again this week, staff at the Tulalip Health Clinic were approached by community members who collected a bag containing several dozen empty “Whip-It” canisters. This is concerning, as it suggests that the gases contained within the canisters are being inhaled. This form of substance abuse is mainly seen in school-age children and younger adults. Inhalants tend to be the first drug that is tried by children, one in four students in America has intentionally abused a common household product to get high by the time they reach eight grade.¹

This product presents a very real danger to the youth and community. These small, cylindrical metal bulbs contain compressed nitrous oxide. The end is pierced and the escaping gas is captured in a balloon and inhaled. “Whip-It’s” are legal to buy, and are available for purchase at several locations throughout the reservation.



Figure 1 “Whip-It” Canister

The effects of inhalant abuse include euphoria, lightheadedness, and a general state of intoxication similar to that produced by alcohol or marijuana. Effects usually last for only 15 to 30 minutes. Death may result from asphyxia, suffocation, or choking on vomitus.

One sniff of nitrous oxide can kill. The first time could be the last time, one sniff is all it takes for “Sudden Sniffing Death” to occur.

In February, Tulalip Police Chief Echevarria reported at least one “Whip It” associated death and is concerned about its presence here on the reservation.

Recommendations

An increased awareness for the potential for inhalant abuse is recommended. Signs that someone is abusing inhalants include: finding empty containers like the one pictured above, having rashes or sores around the mouth or throat, smelling a chemical odor on one’s breath, and general changes in behavior such as a sudden change in grades or friends².

Prevent inhalant abuse by talking to children and teenagers about the dangers of inhalants. If you find someone unconscious and not breathing call 911. If you find someone abusing inhalants and they are awake, don’t argue with them, stress can cause their heart to stop.

References 1 Alliance for Consumer Education. Inhalant Abuse Statistics. <http://www.consumered.org/learn/inhalant-abuse/statistics> 2 National Capitol Poison Center. Parents: know about inhalant abuse. <http://www.poison.org/articles/2007-jun/parents-must-know-about-inhalant-abuse>