**NITROUS OXIDE – INFORMATION FOR PROFESSIONALS**

**What is it?** Nitrous Oxide is a gas, often referred to as laughing gas, nos, chargers, crackers, whippits or balloons. Whilst it has a number of legitimate uses such as medicinal sedation and as a propellant in whipped cream cannisters the recreational use of nitrous oxide, usually inhaled from balloons, has become more popular.

Recreational use is most popular in younger adults: Latest Estimates suggest that in England and Wales 8.7% of 16-24 year olds had taken nitrous oxide for its psychoactive effects compared with 2.3% of 16-59 year olds.

**Legal Status:** It is not illegal to possess nitrous oxide however it is illegal to supply or import it for the purposes of intoxication.

**Effects and Risks:** Nitrous oxide acts as a depressant, not unlike alcohol. It leads to feelings of relaxation or happiness – hence the name, ‘laughing gas’. The effects are short lived, often lasting just a couple of minutes.

Despite its popular use amongst younger adults, fatalities linked to nitrous oxide are extremely low. Between 2001 and 2016, 36 people in England and Wales died from using nitrous oxide.

Such fatalities are often linked to the way it's taken such as the risk of asphyxia from lack of oxygen, particularly if people inhale it using a mask or a plastic bag. Prolonged and heavy use of nitrous oxide can cause vitamin B12 deficiency, nerve damage or anaemia.

**Harm Reduction:** The safest option is not to use nitrous oxide, however where people find

it difficult to stop they may find it useful to get some support from [specialist services.](https://www.changegrowlive.org/the-beacon-walsall/station-street) While risks can never be completely eliminated the following tips might help to reduce harm.

People should never inhale nitrous oxide gas directly from the canister, through a mask or by putting a plastic bag over their head. Inhaling from a balloon is the safest way.

People should take care when releasing canisters. They are very cold and can cause burns. People should let their bodies recover in between doses.

People should ensure they replenish their body’s store of vitamin B12 by eating eggs,

cheese and marmite etc.

If someone becomes unwell due to nitrous consumption they should seek medical attention.