

# Legal Highs



If you've been to a festival, party or even just outside of your house in recent years, it's likely you'll have come into contact with nitrous oxide in some capacity (even if it's just spotting the silver bullet-like canisters used to dispense it in the streets). Those who take the drug recreationally often do so by inhaling the gas from a balloon – but now, experts and users are speaking out about the potential dangers of it, saying that it can lead to nerve damage. Nitrous oxide is also used in some medical settings, such as during labour (when it is typically mixed with oxygen).

## **When did legal highs become illegal?**

The trade in “legal highs” was banned in 2016 when the UK government introduced the Psychoactive Substances Act. Two years later, the government has published a review of the effects of its legislation. The so-called legal highs that were made illegal as class A, B or C drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act, are still covered by that legislation.

## **What are the dangers of legal highs?**

Legal highs can reduce your inhibitions, so you do things you wouldn't normally do. They can cause, paranoia coma, seizures and in rare cases, death. Because the chemical ingredients in a branded product can be changed without you knowing, the risks are unpredictable.

Kerry Donaldson, 25, started inhaling nitrous oxide in 2017, when she and her friends would take it casually on weekends as a ‘social thing’.

*‘Everybody was doing it,’ she said.*

But Kerry’s use of the drug – often called NOS or balloons – soon became more frequent and eventually got to the stage where she would often binge for days at a time.



*She said: ‘I was using them for three days and then I’d be vomiting for the next few days.*

*‘I wouldn’t be able to drink water or eat anything. I’d be sick and sleep for like 12 hours, I was unable to do much.*

*‘Then I’d wake up and do it all over again, it’d be like a cycle.’*

Kerry, from Newham, east London, eventually started losing feeling in her hands and legs and was taken to hospital multiple times.



<https://metro.co.uk/2022/07/27/woman-left-paralysed-after-binging-on-laughing-gas-for-days-at-a-time-17079806/>

She now needs around-the-clock care from her dad, and she is unable to do much by herself.

*She said: 'I'm trying to make the best of the situation. Of course, I regret using nitrous oxide, I wish I was more educated. I want to go into schools and colleges to speak to young people and educate them. I want to go to universities too, as I know balloons are used a lot there.*

All dealers and suppliers care about is making a profit – they don't care about the purity or the safety of whatever you are taking. The best way to stay safe is avoid these dangerous substances altogether.

**A teenager believed to have taken so-called laughing gas at a party in south-east London has died.**

The 18-year-old was taken to hospital after collapsing in a street in Abbey Wood, shortly after 23:15 BST on Saturday. He died two hours later.

The Metropolitan Police said he was believed to have been drinking alcohol as well as ingesting legal high nitrous oxide, also known as laughing gas.



***Seventeen people in the UK died between 2006 and 2012 after taking the drug.***

It's feared the use of nitrous oxide products such as Smartwhip or Goldwhip - cans specially designed and legally sold to the catering industry to whip cream - appear to be at least part of the reason why hospital admissions are "through the roof" since Covid.

Laughing gas provides a short burst of euphoria, lasting no more than a few seconds, but can cause paralysis and even death if inhaled excessively.

It is now the second most used drug by 16–24-year-olds in the UK, with more than half a million young people reporting taking the drug in 2019-20.

## Boy, 16, 'almost died' when his lung burst after inhaling laughing gas at festival



A mum is warning how her teenage son "almost died" when his lung burst after inhaling laughing gas at the Parklife music festival. Alex Littler, 16, was rushed to hospital on Monday after complaining of a swollen neck, breathlessness and that his chest felt like "popping bubble wrap" when touched due to the air leaking from a ruptured lung.

The Year 11 student was forced to confess to doctors and devastated mum Cathy Mccann, 44, that he'd inhaled nitrous

oxide over the weekend while at Parklife in Manchester. He was diagnosed with a ruptured and leaking lung and told he was lucky to be alive, but medics warned he may need surgery to remove air that was trapped around his lungs and heart.

***In 2019-20, 8.7% of 16 to 24-year-olds reported using nitrous oxide in the last 12 months, equivalent to around 549,000 people, according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales.***

### Law

So-called 'legal highs' are now illegal. Possessing these substances with the intent to supply (sell them to other people), offering to supply (like giving some to your mates) or importing legal highs (buying them from internet sites based abroad to be delivered here) can mean you can get up to 7 years in prison and/or a fine.

### **Support links and further advice and guidance:**

<https://www.therecoverylodge.co.uk/legal-highs-psychoactive-substances-help-and-information/>

<https://www.priorygroup.com/addiction-treatment/new-psychoactive-and-illicit-substance-legal-high-addiction-treatment/symptoms-of-legal-high-addiction>

<https://young.scot/get-informed/national/the-effects-of-legal-highs>