

Nitrous Oxide Fact Sheet

What is nitrous oxide?

Nitrous oxide (N₂O), also known as laughing gas, hippie crack, NOS (including many others), CDC defines it as a colorless gas stored as a liquid. N₂O is inhaled through a canister called a whippit or through a balloon. Once inhaled it dissolves into the bloodstream, reaching the brain within seconds. N₂O is contained in many over-the-counter products that can readily be purchased at a local store, such as vegetable spray, cooking sprays, etc.

What is nitrous oxide used for?

N₂O is used often used for sedation and pain relief in many industries such as hospitals, surgery centers, and medical centers, but can also be used in other industries such as food processing and car racing. When used in a controlled setting by a professional it is safe to use; however, it may also lead to severe health effects if misused.

There has been increased misuse of N₂O due to its ability to provide euphoric effects. Due to its increased popularity, it has been reported to be one of the most common drugs in the world. Despite its popularity, many are unaware of the health consequences that may result due to misuse of the drug. It is important to note that the longer the exposure, the more severe symptoms may be.

Is nitrous oxide dangerous?

Just as any other drug, N₂O has the potential to have side effects and, in some cases, result in severe health consequences. As a gas, it is primarily absorbed through the lungs, and exposure can lead to:

- Irritation in the eyes, nose, and/or throat
- Wheezing or worsening cough
- Seizures or significant respiratory depression
- Choking or tightness in the chest
- Headache, lightheadedness, or dizziness
- Shortness of breath (dyspnea)
- Bluish fingers, toes, or lips
- Rapid heart rate, changes in blood pressure (potential heart attack or stroke)
- Psychosis (hallucinations and/or delusions)
- Overdose and/or death

What is being done to prevent misuse?

Nitrous oxide is considered to be a controlled substance, and in 2018 Michigan's House Bill 5463 was signed into place that banned selling or delivering nitrous oxide to anyone under the age of 18, and violators may be subject to a \$500 fine.

Where can people go for help?

For more information or questions, email us at dhealth@detroitmi.gov or call **(313) 876-4000**.

