NITROUS OXIDE
It's no laughing matter
WHAT IS NITROUS OXIDE?

AKA: Nitrous, whippits, laughing gas, NOS

Nitrous Oxide is a colourless gas with a slightly sweet odour and taste. Most people know it as ‘laughing gas’.

It is used by the food industry as a propellant to make whipped cream. Dentists use the gas as an anaesthetic. They mix it with oxygen and administer it through a mask.

Most people get the gas from ‘whippits’ (silver or blue metal cartridges about 7cm long). Using a ‘cracker’ (metal dispenser) the gas is released from the ‘whippit’ and used to inflate a balloon. The gas is then inhaled directly from the balloon. Homemade masks can also be used to inhale the gas.

Some clubs, festivals and ‘raves’ use large nitrous oxide canisters to fill balloons and then offer them for sale.

THE EFFECTS

Inhaling nitrous oxide produces a brief ‘high’ or ‘head rush’ caused by a lack of oxygen. The effects are similar to drinking alcohol but produce a more intense ‘blast’ that lasts for about 2 minutes.

The ‘high’ is followed by light-headedness, giggling, dizziness, distorted sound, slurred speech, difficulty walking and confusion. Some people get headaches and feel sick after they inhale the gas.

THE RISKS

Nitrous oxide affects your coordination and balance so injuries such as bumps, falls and concussion are common. It is dangerous to use the gas with alcohol.

If you inhale too much gas, you may fall unconscious.

Heavy and regular use can cause nerve damage leading to tingling and numbness in the fingers and toes and even difficulties walking.

THE LAW

Nitrous Oxide is legal to possess for personal use, but it is illegal to sell. Giving it away to friends also counts as dealing.

GET SOME HELP

Call Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead’s Young People’s Drug & Alcohol Team on 01628 796518 or email daat@rbwm.gov.uk